The Paris Review

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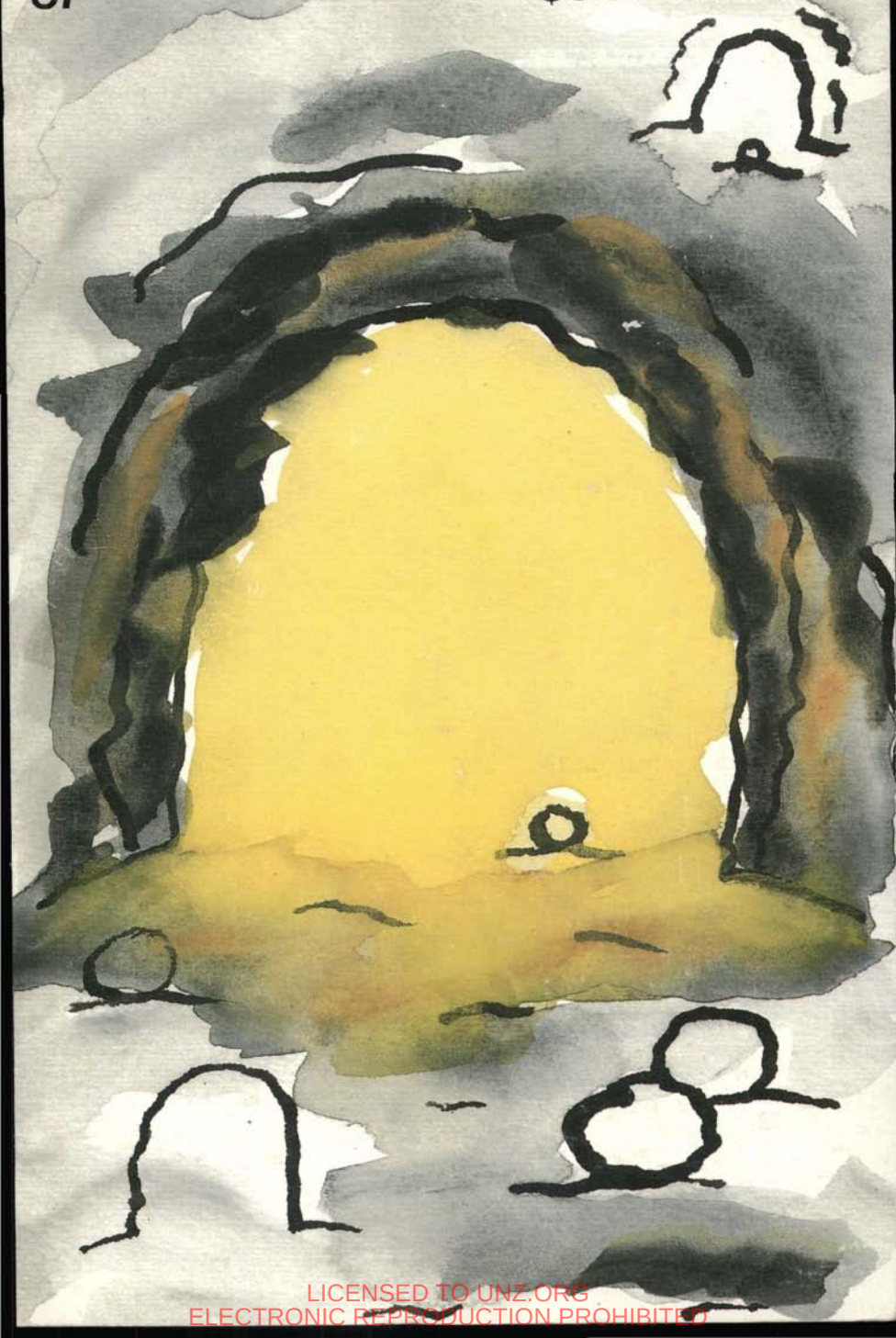

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"Produce the book, then, so that it will detach itself, disengage itself as it scatters: this will not mean that you have produced *the absence of the book*."

—*The Gaze of Orpheus*
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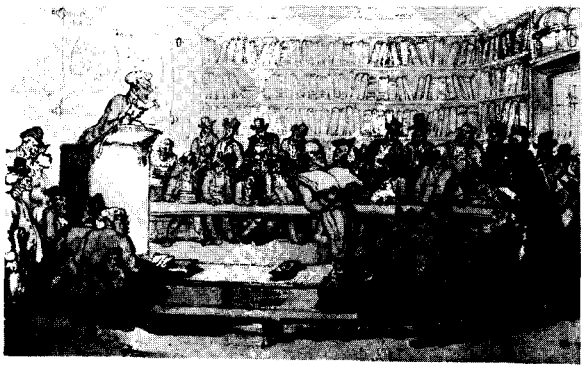

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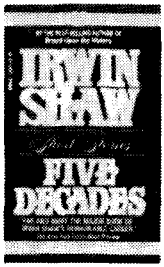

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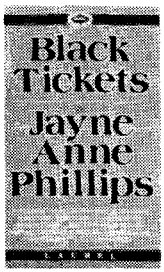

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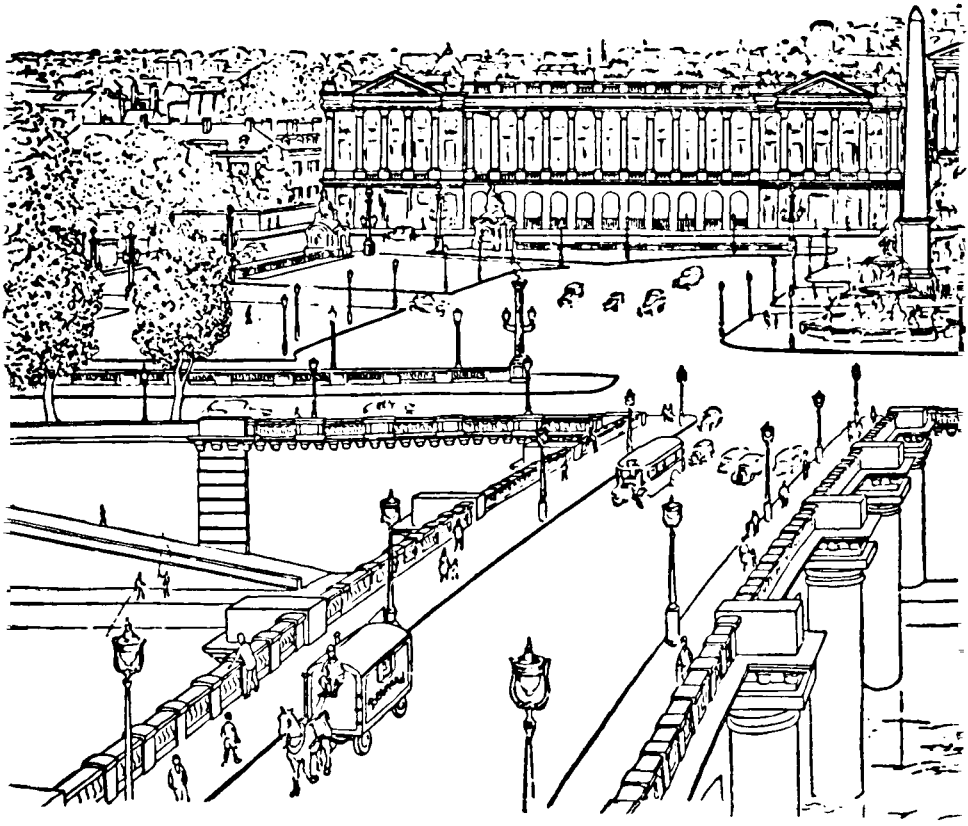

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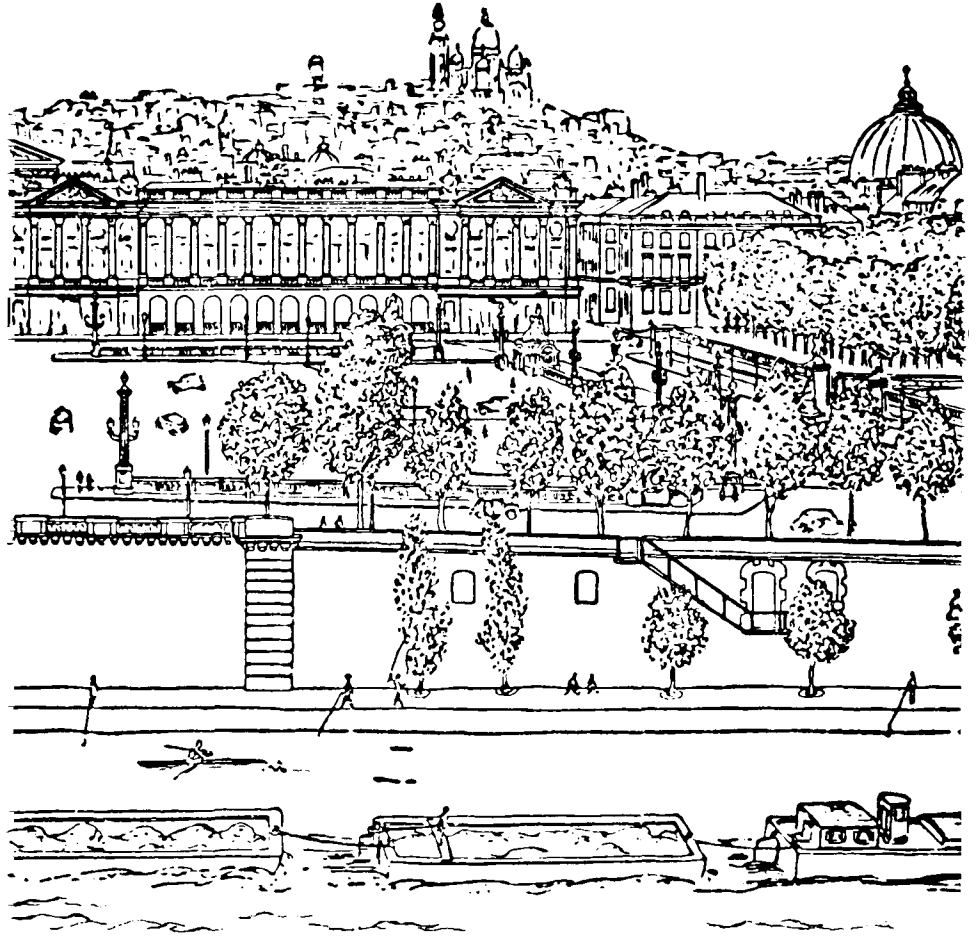

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Praeder's Letters

James Baker Hall

I

Jan. 15, 1956/

Dear Billy, my lad—

Through channels as intricate as life itself, I have in hand a copy of *Stylus*. Thank you, thank you. Indeed I am not dead, though more I cannot say. You are, God bless you, one of the three people in the world who conceivably could care. I sound intolerably grim about it, after all it is a witty poem, worthy of your fine mind, and I am honored to find it dedicated to me, honored is hardly the word...But frankly, excuse me, I am moved by this, deeply, and as usual unable to express myself—forgive me. Thank you, thank you./ But Billy it does take me back, your poem, hurls me back with such emptiness to our cold days in Lex, the Tottle House, the Green Dome, Fetterman & his stinking dogs...Tell me how I fell into the house of a weight lifter, will you,/ how I ended up at the Derby with a julep in hand ...And Winston with his ascots and chemistry set, the man actually slept in my bed, his beard each morning stuck up into the fetid air

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...And Grant C. keeping his profile among the press of students, I miss the man...But I have forgotten the name of the lady in your peom—poem—excuse me—though I do recall her suave tongue and vaginal intensity. And her squalid brain, which I now forgive. /Poetry indeed redeems, you are far the better poet, Billy, I could not have written such incisive lines for that dark lady, I being part of the pot. Thank you.

If the day were longer, my memory better, I would try to account for myself since I left Lexington, your town of sweetness and light, but it is no story anyway, what the hell. I never had business in a university, not for a minute, as I am sure you well know. I was in NYC for a while, worked as a bellhop, fill in the blanks. Am now in the Coast Guard again, in San Juan at my own request, where at the moment I sit with newly bought pad and pen in a café. They speak Spanish here, which is fine with me, shake hands over my head, which isn't. / I am not Gauguin, nor, as the saying goes, was meant to be, but it is true, Billy, that I have bought this pad & pen on the strength of your peom...There I go again, poem, get a hold of yourself, Praeder—On *your* strength it is, these are the first words I have written in who knows & who cares. / San Juan is no Hawaii, thank God. Latins seem to be in my fate & there are certainly worse people in the world. Dignity is upheld here by pissing in the streets. Their honor is agreeable to me, even if they do shake hands over my head, and what more can one ask in this life. / I quit this, else I begin to sound like Ernest Hemingway, your affection for the man notwithstanding. How Ezra tolerated such a child even for the purpose of teaching him is beyond me, but then Ezra usually is. / The truth is, and it always comes out, always, I had in mind with the purchase of this pad & pen not simply to thank you for your elegant & generous dedication but to make of the same stroke an effort of my own...A "Dimensions #3" sort of thing, café hand wrestling in the colors of Jacob with the angel, faint afterimage—if I do not enlarge myself intolerably—of the spirit of the dead watching, no caps, you know the kind...And offer it to your fine magazine. More of that later, if more indeed there is. ///

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I am a radio operator. I work 32 hours a week. I have enough money. I drink some. I fuck some. I read some, mostly history. I stalk barracuda, the only danger I enjoy.

Well that is done with & it didn't take long, what now...I am as shy as a young thing, my hands go to pieces.

Your poem, Praeder, you even spelled it right, now to it—Is this any way to write an old friend? Is this any way to do anything?

Imagine here three asterisks & an ampersand, signifying a lifetime spent between that last sentence & this...In which of course I completed a serious study of Ezra. Have you read *Section: Rock Drill*? It is no *Pisan Cantos*, but then what is...And even wrote my dissertation: the total light process in Chinese character scratched with a hunting knife on my zippo lighter. Tell them about me at Harvard, I'm sure you will.

It isn't Latins in my fate, it's the sea. I will probably end up, mesmerized by agony, staring into the eye of a flying fish, the dark comes from many sources, then the long last header into the brine. If I can ever overcome my embarrassment.

Dearest PS, It is late at night, there are rats under my bed, within the hour the whine of garbage trucks in Calle Sol, and there is no poem. There is no poem. Van Gogh wanted to kill Gauguin with a razor, cut himself instead, and sent the issue to a whore. Before sleep that night, swaddled in the bandages of his next self portrait, he placed a lighted candle in the window in hope that she would come. Can you believe it? I can. Enough, enough. Write me if this does not depress you beyond repair.

Love & kisses, Paul

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Dearest pst—Is it possible for a friend to ask why you sign your poems Baxter Adams? Who, pray, is Baxter Adams? Have you finally become the Maxwell Street Presbyterian Church? Got vocabulary cards in pocket? Wm. Baxter Adams would be bad enough. You are as insufferable as I am & who would have thought it? Face it, Billy, you are just Billy, even to those who love you best. Tell your grandmother I said hi. And be sure to collect your páper route before the 10th of the month. The only hope for a poet is to learn first to pick his nose, you know that, if you don't, just ask

Paul

Jan. 30/56/

Dear Billy & Kathleen—

Why of course I know Kathleen & a pox on her for not remembering, I knew I was never in Lexington, not for a minute. Remind your blushing bride, Billy Baxter, if you please, of that grim blackguard who came to see her in the hospital with Bracket...Now do you remember? I said not a word, hung at the door one foot on top of the other like a minor Dickens come upon a sweetshop window, and said not a word. Pray, what could I say in the presence of such beauty, such suffering? She had misused her arm, on a motorcyle if I am not mistaken, which impressed me mightily, though I would never for one minute have admitted it, never. Her brother was there, or if he wasn't I imagined him, and in addition to my general embarrassment, my silence was due to no uncertain dislike of the man. He was not only better-educated & better-looking than I but more intimate with the young lady. For which I will never forgive him.

All these warts & elbows confuse & irritate you I am sure, as well they should. But the awful truth is, I am at deep heart a rather simple & sentimental fool, and I had rather confuse

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& irritate than embarrass. To embarrass is the only unforgiveable sin. I am sure you have had your fill of congratulations & felicitations, so congratulations & felicitations.

There is only one thing I have ever wanted in this miserable life, from time to time I see it clearly & even, though infrequently, admit it to myself, and that, hold on to your seats, is a wife. *Sovegna vos.* Poetry is the sole tolerable occupation only because love is so difficult. I was going to say impossible, but given the occasion that would be in bad taste. Please pay no attention to me, life is difficult enough as it is. Not even a wife, I often suspect, since I am sure the dignities of marriage are beyond me, leave love out of it, you will have to sooner or later anyway, but a mother for my children. That this will never come to pass is one of the few recommendations left for the world.

Enough of this, I had in mind ceremony, as I always do, and lest you think I am a fraud, here my children of sweetness & light is what I propose, to wit...

//BUT FIRST, forgive me, there are poems at hand, first things first, my selfish schemes can wait, I would never forgive myself, though I am afraid, *hermano*, I have hard words for your young ears. This business about taking the summer off to write a navel, ooops hovel, ooops the truth again as always outs, novel—there now, finally—well, it is...what? Pure Kentuckiana, you are the most careful bastard I have ever encountered, more careful than Grant C., you are all so careful, it is why I left, get your finger out of your ass. If you will excuse me for saying so, you will someday have to choose between being a paperboy & a writer. & FURTHERMORE, as Ezra would say, if you want to be a poet you will have to make harder choices still. I saw a man this morning in Calle Sol, his eyes swollen shut from a beating. His young son was with him, hand in hand. It was impossible to tell who was leading who, not even they knew, I am sure. Take off from what, pray? Is writing a part of your life or not? And a

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summer, good God Adams, if I did not know you to be brilliant but young I would think you a fool. You might as well take the summer off to play with yourself or make mobiles for the crippled children. If you have a novel to write you will write it & it will cost you your life, if it is worth writing, don't talk to me about taking the summer off./ Which brings me to your poem *de* Soutine, lucky you did not try to write about Gauguin, I would come to Lexington & crack your head—But even Soutine, who incidently you vastly overrate, deserves better, at least half your mind, and let's face it, a little of your heart, just a little, Billy. Have you ever looked at his work? I think not. You are writing about a man's struggle for his integrity & you seem hardly aware of the fact—skimming surfaces you suppose comely and never use the word rainbow again, never. Maybe in French, I don't know, but you prove no more able to restore the word to English than Mr. Lawrence, the less said about the innocent the better. I sorely mistrust anyone who hangs carcasses in his room to watch them rot, but I have an inkling of what such fits are about, having specialized in them most of my life, but you seem to have not the slightest, a careful Kentuckian with his finger missing. If I sound intolerably arrogant it is because I am, but this is not a matter of taste, yours, mine or anybody else's. I am surely the oldest man alive, surely./ What do you think of me now, Kathleen?/ And because I know you to be a poet in the making, one of the two or three I have ever known, and I include all the books in the Library of Congress, and know that you have no need or want of delicacies & subtle inflections, which are always lies, always, leave them to your Kentuckians & academics. I have a 12th Century mind, best to face it./ & WHATSMORE your handwriting is worse than mine, worse than the blind JJ in the last mix of the Wake, desist. What do you mean you gave your typewriter to Ducksoo, I thought surely he would be president of Korea by now, if not the world, what kind of castration is that? You did not want to type *de* Soutine, as well you shouldn't, the man sucking the artist again, giving away his typewriter indeed. Don't tell Orphan

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Annie about hard times, do everything for him or nothing, rent him a typewriter & pay the rent from your paper route, who'll pay the rent/I'll pay the rent, only don't give Mata Hari or even Ezra your typewriter. Maybe you should take the summer off to write a novel after all. I'll get off your back if you will, you didn't lose a leg at Argonne, that's the trouble. There is a word in Hawaiian, *hanamai*, it means, literally, work-sick. It is used with regards to fucking mostly—excuse me Kathleen—but equally applicable to poetry, there not being nearly as much poetry in Hawaii as fucking, or anywhere else—Work until you are sick & then work a little more, Billy. There is no other way. And that is not something Grant C or this man Harris will tell you. Trust old Stanislaski, I love you well *hermano*, but you are a clod sometimes, even on your wedding night./ Which brings to me to "The Tightrope Walker", a great poem. Here you have gone in & done your work, instructed me, which is the least I expect of you, and moved me, which is the most. That the man who wrote "The Tightrope Walker" wrote in the same lifetime this business *de* Soutine boggles the mind. It is a work of near genius, there are no rainbows in it, you are writing from where you live, I honor you, you can have my typewriter anytime./ Which brings me to my last business, please stop maligning your magazine, immediately. I know only too well what the *Hudson Review* & those hounds have to offer that *Stylus* does not & it is why I prefer you absolutely.

Which brings me back to my beginning, as everything seems to. Listen, if this sounds utterly presumptuous just tell me, I'll understand—But I thought maybe the two of you would like to come down here this summer—A honeymoon, or a vacation, or however you chose to think of it—I don't have a great deal to offer, but this is a tolerable place, one of the very few, there is sun & beach & water, San Juan is beautiful, the old city. I will get you a place, you need not worry about anything except getting here. During the day you will be left alone, strictly, and at night we will eat & drink wine & talk—

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As the spirit moves us, we will take long walks—Just tell me if I am a fool, I will understand. There are even several other people here whose company is no more trying than my own. What do you say? You can write your novel here, Billy, on my typewriter.

l&k, p.

Feb. 12/

Dear Billy Baxter Axter, *il milgor fabbro*—

The garbage trucks are whining in the streets below, the lizards hang on the window screen in front of my face, they have followed me around the world & found me not wanting, sly & cunning. Odysseus, all sunburst & cloudfist, ruined western culture & not even Ezra understands it. Listen you constipated bug-eyed cocksucker, I feel the moment like an old San Juan whore sequaciously into her decline among oils & lotions, seeing the first honest smile of a lifetime. You are decent, a decent man, gentle beyond imagination, I will do everything I can to justify the trust you place in me. Frankly I thought, when I dropped that letter, that I was mad, on the long razor slide back to childhood, dreams will be the death of us all, and had dignity permitted I would have entered the chute bellbottoms up & flapping to retrieve it. It would embarrass us all for you to know how moved I am that you are coming here./ And since I seem intent on speaking to you both & despise deception, especially my own, let me begin again, formally—

Dear Bill & Sweet Kathleen, my children of light—

I am nothing if not formal. Permit me the crudity of addressing you both in one letter: the truth is, the only excuse for beginning anything again is in those words: the truth is: the admission that all that has gone before is a lie & the hope, beyond all reason, that what follows will not be. The truth is

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I have been defeated, repeat defeated for the ten thousandth time at prose. I had the innocence to try once more to write the great american something or other & no doubt will again I'm sure. When I know beyond even small quarrel that I have not one whit the character necessary for anything but short poems, very short. You, Billy, will write the great american something or other, but I have read nothing & never will & will end badly. My last sentence, torn from the carriage in a yellow crumple lying portside now, reads—

Sweetness & light left Mudville about this time, we on its heels. Closer to the sea...

Isn't that just dot dot dot? My but aren't I just dot dot dot? My brain unravels in prose, sentence by sentence, five pages & I'm hanging on the screen with the lizards. I want, desperately, my magnum opus, my periplum, something Homeric & grand, want nothing else frankly. I was born the wrong man in the wrong time, maybe I should race sports cars or make fishnets.

All things that are are light—But how does one say that in story—Closer to the sea indeed. *There is no telling* is an americanism, it is the title of a novel about america, it is a novel about america—So that is my fate, to write the title of a novel never to be written, such a well of light there is no shadow, nothing can follow. There is no telling, there is no telling indeed, closer to the sea. I have a theory, I doubt that it is mine, but I claim it anyway, that holds out the possibility of a sound for every person, a kind of cosmic auditory crosshair, music of the spheres sort of thing, and you dissolve on contact with your sound, dissolve, nirvana. And so it must be true that *le mot juste*, if it is *juste* enough, would dissolve everything that went before & after. There is no telling, no telling indeed. I know that you think I am rationalizing, Billy, but that is all you know.

Enough, enough, tell me to keep my defeat to myself, you are right of course. Here I am off on this tent rope of ill

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humor, as always...Let me slide down & speak of the poems I packed off so brashly, giving you scarce time to breathe. You are too kind, too kind, I languish in praise, become intolerable. And you, Kathleen, are a sweet breath of light into this grim consternation, poets among semi-colons & line feeds. I shall say of Kathleen, Kathleen enmeshed Adams in what he loved & that was speech & that was Kathleen.

Aren't I the one though.

There is at hand the last I hope of a long feather of letters, perfumed, from one Warren Sams, editor of the *Totem Review,* and he wishes if I understand him properly to fly all the way to San Juan to suck my cock. And I don't even know the man, what has happened to manners? And while most of them are dull & literary & full of lies he says this—I grow old, I grow old, I shall wear my foreskin rolled, unquote. Kafka once said in a letter, send me a stone for my birthday, it will contain all our love. Or was it Rilke? How is that, Adams? You aren't so goddamn smart. If you talk like Degas, you have to paint like Degas, not Theo's concierge. At least Van Gogh believed in God. Get out of the university immediately or else you will turn into a sports car or a presbyterian. Tell them about me at Oxford, or better Gethsemane, I have always been tempted to become a monk, will if I don't kill myself.

I read your bloody "Quaker Graveyard," wait let me read it again ... I was right the first time, might have known. Frightfully downeast, extolling Boston ladies & Constant Comment heirglooms until I thought I would puke. He takes himself about too much in a picnic hamper, all torqued up in the modern mode, full of angst, but a picnic hamper nonetheless, as incidentally you do too. Both of you want to be pitied above all else & of course are. But then I have always been a snob if not a fool. If EZ Po is right & one needs only six great lines to become immortal, then Lowell has made it already, to wit:

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...Let the sea-gulls wail.
For water, for the deep where the high tide
Mutters to its hurt self, mutters and ebbs.
Waves wallow in their wash, go out and out,
Leave only the death-rattle of crabs,
Sucking the ocean's side.

That is not from the picture window or the after-dinner stroll. I would have it written on my wall, on my grave, on my chest, so don't tell me I am not well read you impudent bastard.

Which reminds me, all this talk of graves & the sea—One favor, I am ashamed to ask it, ashamed, but listen: Barbara Bradford, do you know her? Taught English to illiterate freshmen like myself when I was there & maybe still does: well, there is really no civilized way to handle this, so what the hell, here it is—We had a love affair, Barbara & I. And since I was her student & it was most indiscreet we let not a soul know. Even now you must not, that covey of old maid professors would land on her, jackals & magpies, promise me. So bring me word of her, will you? I dare not write to her, for I am in love with her still, I write poems to her, will for the rest of my life. Isn't this the silliest goddamn thing you have ever heard? Go see her for me & hold her hand, ask about her health or the weather or her brother...What is it that all the women I love have brothers they buy sports cars for? Someone told me she was Dean of Women at some fancy eastern girls school, but I refuse to believe it. Persuade your blushing bride, Billy, not to use so many exclamation points, or I will fall upon her in a fever. Don't tell me I was young once myself, it is not true.

l&k, paul

February 13, 1956/
San Juan, P.R.

Kathleen, Kathleen, as I live & breathe my death, you are

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sweet, you are the one, I love you & hardly know you. The first thing I will tell your genius husband on deplaning is to watch you with latin cunning, for I will find you in secret at the first chance. What all your funny questions amount to is this: can you live here the way Mommy taught you & the answer is absolutely not. There is no place like home & no one like Mommy, thank God, if you want the Brown Hotel in Louisville, then please go to the Brown Hotel in Louisville. Come here some other time, if you wish. There are lizards & bugs here, dirty children, incurable disease, death, nothing heroic that is not essentially sad. Still I fully expect you to depart in finer health than you arrive & forget about books, I won't let you read one if you bring it. Is it not enough to talk, fish & drink rum? I have a deep hatred of books, with which I will infect you I am sure. And tourists, if you wear a funny hat & bring a camera I will likely hit you in the groin. Do women have groins? I talk to you this way because I love you, you myopic hussy. What gall not to remember me, I spoke to you four or five times. And I can be depended upon to do any & everything for those I love, get you bottles of aspirin & mosquito spray. Please, please, it is all cared for, food, lodging, everything, I have even had the water of San Juan purified, just bring a pretty summer dress & a bathing suit. You can, I promise, turn right around & go back if you become ill or unhappy. Nothing is inexorable, no big steps, only many small ones, no grand passions, only many sweet loves—Ah well you are a sweet & tender young thing, of my own description, something I have never been, how am I to know what goes through such a head—I am used to the islands & the islanders, trust me, I will hover about you with smiles & the latest issue of *The New Yorker*, generally protect you from the foggy dew. If you were my own fair bride I would not be so solicitous. It is my belief that a woman, if she is to be lived with, must be totally disillusioned, then rebuilt with care...An idea which has proved unworkable to date. Don't be dull & don't believe anything you hear about anyplace or anybody, even if I say it, Yr. Servant, paul.

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& yet again, later:

I had every hope of getting out of this alive, but the truth is no such thing is possible, ever. The truth is I am almost afraid to say anything. We have all had such good response one to the other. It is all very good & new, very exciting. The truth is I have avoided, as usual, saying the one thing this letter was meant to say. Instead I spoke, as usual, of my defeat, as if it were not inevitable & beside the point. Laid it, I see now, portside at your feet, Praeder in a yellow crumple, such a pity. Fuck the defeats, the truth is I am again suffering them. The truth is I am again writing. The truth is I cannot tell you what your letters mean to me & this visit. Perhaps we are even honest, perhaps we can purify one another, holding our distant mirrors up to nature & to ourselves. I believe it./ These poems then, what does one say? I began this letter with little else in mind, some civilized way to put them into your hands, and tried to end it without even sending them. What does one say indeed. You are the first to see them, not even Barbara. I could not tolerate some horsesass at the *Antioch Review* defining himself in their presence. I do hope you will bring word to Barbara, it weighs into the silence at the end of each sentence, heavy among all things I can & cannot say. I will not mention it again, cannot, you must understand. It is of course no matter. They look meager enough, a couple of dozen lines, twenty-nine years. I find it impossible to talk about them, to think about them even. I go off in small motions of dread, turning back on myself, embarrassed & hurt. The one called "Light" is simply the typographic expression of dragonflies in summer, they are beautiful mating over a black lake, quite beautiful. The only hitch is, the female eats the male for supper after love. First I called it "Light", then "Song #8 for Barbara", then "Light" again. Which I suppose, come to think of it, is the story of my life. Too bad.

Love to you both, paul

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Feb. 22/ 1956/

My dear lotus, on the oblique, my blossom:

A letter at hand from your husband, says you are in a skunk hole & spinning down, badly, to write & cheer you up. I will do no such thing. You have slept with another man, it means nothing to me that you are married to him, now you must pay the price, don't expect sympathy from me, you're lucky you don't have VD.

Here I sit o carib isle o sun sequestered, newly barbered, smelling of soaps & lotions, and it is not in me to be cunning & cheery to a friend's wife, I feel too good, always do when I am freshly barbered. I smoke too much, and I am an evil man, bad, but when I smell of soaps & lotions I could fill Carnegie Hall, argue with Schoenberg about Brahms, atonal or minor A, fully expect in the next post a sapphire tiepin from the Royal Family of Belgium. Tell the doctor there there are doctors here, civilization, tissues, pills, even a hospital if it will put his mind at rest, that women have children here daily. One of the seventeen sufficient reasons that I would not be a woman is that you cannot be barbered among mirrors & straight razors, in a white cape leaned back, head to rest, and spun, raised & lowered among lotions, shaved among mirrors, my—A man of my temperament would have a private barber—See Praeder among the honored dead, look at him I say look; he is peaceful in the kind light, he brings lemon drops & seaweed, he eats fresh fruit on the flagstone terrace, he entertains his friends with madrigals & Elizabethan chants, a pavane of hawkbells to the backing sea, Praeder—Which reminds me of the story of my life, did I ever tell you? I ran off to Chicago with an aesthetic belly-dancer at 16, and my mommy didn't even care. How I ended up in Lexington, in a university no less, remains to this day a mystery, though surely it had something to do with my brother, who was determined to live there, because of his wife I think. Wherever, whenever determination is involved there is always a wife in it somewhere, always. Have you ever

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read Dostoevsky? Have you ever heard of Dostoevsky? I myself have read only ten things: four poems, a play by Chekhov & two by Shakespeare, and three novels...But they were chosen with great cunning & I have parlayed them into a reputation for wide reading & meanness, ask your husband. You/he should never have told me that he was out of town, I feel adulterous, beware of envy, there is nothing in the crosshatches of the heart so dark. I have written all this under abiding pressure, I keep looking at how much I have & saying is that enough, is that enough, can I tell now. For you see I am shaved & showered in celebration: the editor of the *Antioch Review*, one Miller Norman, has seen fit to accept one of my poems for publication in his magazine. There it is out, in all its blushing intensity, I have been dissolved all day with joy, I am a child at heart, younger than Billy, forgive me. I am sure now to be rich & famous, will you still love me? Your doctor sounds like all of Lexington to me, he should live at least half the year with his plumbing out of doors. Does Billy still like Ernest Hemingway? Can you explain that? I cannot, I assure you, don't worry. He is not even a gifted stylist, as even his detractors claim, and I say that never having read a word he has written. When I tell you not to trust me I mean it absolutely, I have a breadstick up my nose. Are you sure that you are married to this man, not just living with him, temporarily, I refuse to believe it. There is an old foul who lives outside the walls here, SJ, La Marina, they call him Poeta because he speaks to the empty air & recites portions of books the tobacco trade once paid him to read to the workers. Imagine that will you? A particularly vile drunkard now, the trade gone & with it his job, no need for a reader of the classics or the alabaster of rhyme, and what oh what would America be like if the classics had a wide circulation, well it troubles my sleep. And so he stands in the middle of the street when the cantinas are closing, La Poeta reading from an imaginary book, and the children have at him, and rightly so, he has outlived his art, damn him, it will never happen to me, not today. Do you, I say do you smell as good as I do, my sweet, moving among your Gimbels & your Macy's,

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a snapdragon sprouting from your nostril? But then it is a foolish question, no one smells as good as I do today, not even you, Nicean bark, supple & knowing, so full of life, tish tish—

I grow old, I grow old, I need a drink...Will fold this neatly & take it with me to the post office. All good things begin & end in the post office at night, late at night, and it is late now, my sweet. The post office—you will write, won't you?—late at night troubles my sleep. See me peering into my box, a hand shading my eyes. I like envelopes with barber poles around the edge, periplum—I go to pieces. I leave my room now, but I will be true to you, fear not. Write to me, soon.

Yours with gusto,
paul

If you drive to Miami & stay with my brother you can put the bloody car on blocks in his garage, he has nothing to show for his life but a garage, make him do the work, he is a disgrace to the name, or in the backyard with a plastic cover, or in the front, better, it would serve him right. It would serve you all right. Are you sure that you can live for a month without your car? Without your mother? Your doctor? And another word about money, I will return your letters unopened. The CG covers me continually with dollars, I have no time to spend them. I could write upon this all night, have absolutely no sense of proportion, or tact. Good night again, my sweet. All that stands between us is your husband, whom I admire beyond measure, a better man for certain.

April 14, 1955/
San Juan, P.R.

Dear Bill and Kathleen—

I have written you two letters and just threw away the second. Allow me this silence, I am desolate of late.

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You sound sad. Don't come if you have no heart for the trip, Billy. I will understand. If school and directions fill up your life, then join school and directions, by all means. The rest is none of my business. I have little to offer really, aimlessness and occasional articulation, very occasional. Come only on impulse, for that is my way, and the way I admire in others. Worry about anything but accommodations, please, they will be fitting. You can stay in the hospital if you wish.

p.

April 22/Calle Sol/

Dear My Friends—

Well, as I live & breathe, you are the one, both, my Billy my lotus. I spin in the air above your heads, light & cunning. Hellow there, hellow there indeed, now listen: Billy: you have written a good poem, yet another, as usual, I am rolled over on my back: feet in the air with admiration. But you are too smart for your own good, I am sure of it, do you know what I mean? In Washington there is an art gallery which is better than most, not I think because of the paintings they hold, but because of the man who runs it. You must go there, immediately if possible, this very day, for they have finally shown El Greco for the fraud he is—A man of no true feeling, of large & suave gesture, theatrical in the worst sense, broad & unclean & facile & worse: an evil man, for he purports to be religious, Toledo & saints & light aspiring, faces to the heavens, blue, God in the backstays of the sun, topaz cloudfists—I hate the man, intensely. If I ever have children I will permit them to play in the street & talk to strangers & pick mushrooms, but never to look at El Greco without me present. And so in Washington some curator, all he did was hang him next to Goya, and that is that. No arrows, no critics in the wings, no whispers. But there it all is: next to Goya the man is undone, revealed. You want to make holes

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in the canvas, hang him in tar. You are not El Greco surely, if delivering newspapers has done nothing else it has kept you modest, any more I suspect than you could become Goya, or would want to for that matter. But five lines are often enough, if you pay for them, *n'est-ce pas?* You carry around too many words in your mouth, Billy, and they come out too easily, you are brighter than you are deep in this poem, which is not you, ask uncle Paul, the smartest man alive. You ain't holy & surely I ain't holy, but good poetry can be. Throw the rascals out, the old turds, never write a poem you don't absolutely have to. And drink at least one glass of milk every day. I could be wrong but I am not.

//now to Kathleen, my dear mystery. I think of my own young bride whenever I address you, it is time I married & had a son, younger than you, shy & younger than anyone. So that her soul will take its shape in my person & save us both anguish. Young & in love with the sea, one who laughs & cries but not all the time. Do you know the kind? It is little enough to ask. I have lived too long in rented rooms, I have lived too long. I see my bride at the kitchen table, loving & tender, she types my work and spells the words properly, puts in all the commas, I like her already. I have a lung as of today is what I want to say & I fully intend to horrify Billy by insisting that you dive to one hundred feet, foetus & all. That will deepen him I dare say. There is room for a woman in a poet's life, in his language, as long as she bears him sons & is as sweet as Kathleen, as healthy, as prudent & brave. I distrust the whole sex of course, love only

dot dot dot///The truth is, my dear friends, I have been sitting here some time now having written myself into the desolation of that construction—I LOVE ONLY—And what, pray, does one say then, what indeed—It is, I fear, a long life, to be dealt with day by day, eyes close in, look not back or to the future, be still, neat in small hopes. But the equal truth is, my dear Bill & Kathleen, and I will not darken it further: your letter brought me back from the dead. I cannot

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believe you are coming. I have looked on it with such odd extravagance, someone to talk to, to walk with. I have too much time to think & not heart enough to sustain myself. I am grateful, thank you, thank you.

en temps, p.

You said nothing of my songs for Barbara. I do my best & what the fuck do I care if you like it or not. Just so if anyone asks you, the scheme of the work is the Roman liturgy, more intricate than Dante & Ezra. How do you like that for knees & elbows. I heard from Grant C, he dead, and I truly regret, I cannot help him, I have tried. I have lost everything suddenly. Should shut up, don't know how. You must act, I know you must act now or the jimjams will swallow you. Act. And hate. That is important. You don't know but think you do.

My hands go to pieces, I know more of the jimjams than any man alive & much else besides.

Grunts & fardels, paul

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II

August 20, 1956 /

and and and my mind is a barber pole, my soul the sea, dear Billy, what have we here. I feel better than I ought today, mistrust me.

There is news: I have a fine new apt, Doc & I do, in Calle Sol as a matter of spiritual fact, not six ax handles from the place on the wall where we all sat that eve viewing the stilly deep. I might be too old for a roommate, I might be too old for everything, but we will see. If I can tolerate anyone, if anyone can tolerate me, it is Doc. He continues to talk constantly about leaving the CG, but then I do myself, we all do.

//Listen, Billy, I know nothing of Lexington gossip, it would take me seven years to approach the first nuance I am sure, and life is sad enough as it is. You will have to forgive me. If Grant knows one thousand things, as he said he did one night when we were drunk, then you and I together know three dozen, no more. You have more to learn from the man than you seem to know. Not as a writing teacher, you know full well I do not believe in such things, nor does he, but as a man. We all do the best we can & it is not good enough, nowhere near. Lexington defeated me & with ease. I am sorry, but that is the best I can do.//

Well, well, *caro*, I can withhold no longer, I see now where all this is a-leading: the truth is that Miller Norman sent some of my things to Wm. Carlos Williams, and the old fuck liked them. In fact wrote me the kindest letter I have ever received, ever will, said that the island poems are "major work," can you believe it. I am dissolved in gratitude & confused. I reread him wanting my mind changed, but it wasn't. Kindness does not make great poetry, though he certainly

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does more by it than most. The harder he tries to show what a testy old doc he is the sillier he gets. Not a word from Ezra, I should have known better. Write to me, old fuck, I perish without attention.

l&k, P

October something/1956/
SJPR

Dear Billy,

I have just come back from Atlanta where I gave a poetry reading. Don't act as though you are not impressed. So you will excuse my long silence. Or perhaps not. I would not blame you, now or ever. It was Miller Norman's doing, I should be indebted to him for life, probably will be. Robert Lowell wasn't there but everyone else was, I am sure. From the names I recognized I concluded that everyone there was Somebody, which I am sure they were, and that were I not the most perverse, circuitous sonofabitch in the world I would have enjoyed being among the chosen. Lest you think I have lost the last trace of sanity, I was one third of an hour & a half program of the young & unheard of, the other two thirds of which were indeed young, I never felt so old in all my life. The thought of them makes murder in me. They were merely young, I am sure, but I seem to have lost all patience. I read, tolerably well considering, and am still unknown, though not as young as I used to be, never was. I left convinced of one thing, that either I change my name to Randall Ciardi or I will never get my poems published, forget the opera. There was a fellow there by the name of S——, a poet, you've probably heard of him, and he was kind enough to take a cc of the island poems back to the university of somewhere with him for closer inspection. Has a friend who writes music. Don't we all.

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The truth is, I met a man there who claims to know Barbara, said she had married a reverend & was leaving the academy. I refuse to believe it. I had fully intended to read my songs, but I could no more have read them, no more. We are all too sensitive to be alive. I am cursed with the ability to see myself clearly from time to time. Unavoidably we meet ourselves in dirty rooms, lying awake on a sprung bed, where we are forgotten & can forget nothing. It is not worth it, it is not worth anything. In the struggle to find a shred of ourselves in the tangle of days & nights we are painfully all eyes, painfully. Everyone we know walks across the flowered wall, across the ceiling, we could never touch them, we can never touch them.////

But all is not lost, you constipated old pearl diver. I have been waiting the while to tell you this, a pox on you & Grant, for I sent the long one to *Poetry*, hoping that they would take it & give me the prize, thus confounding you both, you overweaning facist pricks, and they did. So are you?

Which reminds me, somehow, Clara del Fonte, of Weimaraner fame, she calls daily to inquire of you, she was charmed out of her mind, Billy, what did you do all those times at the cabana, what did you do? She pretends to be interested in Kathleen too, but clearly you have seized her heart. What should I invest her with next time, cunning words of my own choice?

Advice is useless projection, *malo*, moonshine in the dirt. Never take it, even from me. So here is my advice: why don't you get out of Lexington? Tell me I know not what I say, and it is true. The truth is, the truth is...I'll stop, that is the only decent thing to do, and I am nothing if not decent, nothing indeed.

The final truth is, there is no disorder, but it takes a saint, nothing less. You are nearly a saint. I will send you a hawk-bell as soon as I locate one.

amor, p.

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/Doc got his leg scraped up by a Mako shark, is insufferable about it.

[no date]

Dear Bill/ Things go badly with me. I have nothing to share & love no one. This is why you & I quarreled here. It had nothing to do with Kathleen. I am empty: not shallow but empty. And so will you be in a few years. I heard about you & Kathleen, sorry. Get an older chick next time. Few women understand anything but the more age they acquire the more they learn to look sweet, wise & helpful, quietly. I don't know, maybe your heart is broken, if so I am sorry.

love & kisses, P.

February 3, 1957/

Dear Billy—

Looks like I will be in the east come spring, Washington or New York. I put in for a transfer, don't ask me to explain. I will go to St. Thomas for three weeks before I leave, or maybe three hours. I wish we could have gotten over there while you were here, and St. Croix. St. Thomas is like a university library, a great place taken over by the wrong people. It makes the ruined magnificence of San Juan agreeable indeed.

Look again, *mira*, it is none of my business, obviously, but things are as bad as they seem, they always have been, and I would not for one minute deny it, but they cannot after all get worse. That sounds, I am sure, like the sophistry of a brittle soul, as you so aptly call me, but it is not. As you grow & grow older, you will come into it with relief. The truth is: your letter, it has moved me deeply. Perhaps I should take your advice & keep my mouth shut. But it is not me you are angry with, Billy, it is not even Kathleen. You are

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suffering, I am sorry. But there is no way around it, not if you want to be a man, and not if you want to write poetry. Writing is no answer, but when you feel deeply there is little else to do. What you say now is of no importance, about me, or her, or anyone: a real affection is rising in you. There are men around me daily who have at life & have at women, and they are nothing. It is the quality of the affection that matters, the only thing. You know that better than I. Tragedy? Women? Love? Children? Fuck them all, Billy, leave them to men whose eyes have not been torn out of their heads by what they have seen. You may not believe this, you may not be ready to believe this yet/still: in your suffering you have made yourself responsible to the empty air, to God, to the world, it is all the same. Men & women may love you but you cannot love them no matter how you try & it will in time kill you. All that you can have, and it is by no means certain that you will attain it, is greatness, a great spirit. Agony will in time have no meaning. Get your goddamn typewriter into the hospital with you, for christsakes man, and don't be idle. Forget about finishing school. A degree has nothing to do with anything. And for christsakes, man, forget about going on to graduate school. Four years is already too many. I am encouraged in my own work by you, don't want your stimulation to stop. If it kills you, too bad.

1, p.

April 14, 1957/
Washington, D.C

Dear Billy—The failed spirit is disapproving & hides from its failure in reason. Or in clever posturing. Perhaps I do not often act as though I know that but I do. You were always one to construct the most shameless motives for yourself. You will, I dare say, be easier to live with when you grow up. You abandon the poet in yourself for what, Billy? A PhD is the sure way to win all the arguments? Don't talk logic & organization & responsibility to me & then call it order. You

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sound as desperate as I, as distraught, and that will not do. All this talk of the mind & of reason & of consequence, your rage for order precludes the very possibility. If that's what it takes to get you out of the hospital perhaps you had better stay in. Don't try to pass your disapprovals off as moral judgments, there is nothing moral in them. The real world you are wont to talk so much about is accessible not to the mind but to the soul only. And Kathleen is as much a part of it as you are, whatever her actions. And for that matter I am too, if I may be allowed to say so. Excuse me, but you have made such talk inescapable. A morality that is not essentially spiritual turns out to be nothing but ethics. If all you want is to be right, who do you imagine, in the end, will care whether you are or not? Yourself? Not even yourself, Billy—you have that to learn too. If all you want is to win arguments, then I'm sure you will, all of them. I believe that if you are very careful, if you stay close with yourself & work diligently, a master of your craft, of the lights of your days & your heart, if you ask for little & accept all & find joy in your art, that you will come one day into the presence of the fact that all your labor has amounted to is the most vacant throat-cutting cipher. But still if in the face of that you choose to do nothing, if you permit disorder & drift, as I have, all dark & hell moves in & about you. Careful that your sadness does not make you less keen. If there is tragedy in any part of your life, then make a formal complaint. Argument is no answer to a grown man's need, no more than celtic mist. Be a classicist, your art in profile, else all life is intolerable. Disorder & drift are not your way, Billy, you drive yourself at the world like a stake, but it is the same thing. The truth is there is no disorder. There's your moral, there is only the one. Just because you & I ain't holy enough doesn't mean we have to think we are. If one must be a fascist to face up to daylight, then one must be a fascist. I will go that far with the pragmatists, tired Mau Maus that they are. But frankly I would prefer to be a saint. Now wouldn't you? Ask B. Doyle. Ask God. Be a blackshirt. Hold tight.

No, Billy, I didn't mean that. Never again will I let my

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cleverness exit me, not today. Don't hold tight, let loose. A frightened life is not worth living, just ask uncle Paul. You cannot choose where the world takes you, only whether you will go. Go mad if that is where your life is leading you. When & if you come back you might know something. // more later

So I am stateside again, & not absolutely sad, in Washington with Ike & Dick, the nation's capital, & if memory serves me I am still cg, in Communications so they say. I cannot be unhappy, not absolutely, for—hold on to your seat Billy-boy—there is a man in this world who wants to publish a book of my peoms/I will have no more of that, poems, there, that ought to impress them. Kindness confuses me, I sit of late across the table from myself. Maybe he wants to suck my cock & thinks this is the way to go about it, who knows, I ask fewer questions each year, he won't be the first. But he seems perfectly nice & genuine in his admiration, and not unintelligent. The volume is to be called *Songs for Barbara* & will include all the island pieces, one into the other. If it happens I will be forever grateful, no doubt will join the church & change my attitude.

I called St. Elizabeth's & if I get some doctor's permission I can ask Ezra if he will see me. Maybe I will have firsthand news of the great man next time. He never answered my letter, well people say but little to me, guess that is why I write, to try to get conversation going, rapport, snort, cavort. I am full of passionate intensity & worse.

hasta la vista, p

October 18, 1957/
D.C.

Well *Querido Primo*—

Howl is here, & I thank you, there is a good deal to this Ginsberg. He wants polish, which no doubt his program will make difficult, but I salute him.//

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So much has happened since I last wrote, as they say—fill in the blanks. I was in Lexington some few weeks ago, shortly after you left, and saw Grant & Kathleen's family & your son. Kathleen was in Bloomington already. I have been sitting here for a lifetime, stopped at that last sentence. Surely I had more in mind than facts, facts interest me not at all, I know as few as humanly possible. But Lexington puts an end to thought. Comfort has its final say there. I am glad you are out. I spent ten days, two days, maybe it was only four minutes on a fishing boat out of St. Thomas before I left, a lifetime, at least one. I almost jumped. Remind me to tell you about it someday.

When in Lex I saw Barbara, well it is out & I'm glad, and the truth is I still love her, always have always will—whatever that means. I told her of my book & she cried. I don't know how to explain, this or anything, I understand nothing that happens, especially between men & women. She did marry a reverend, it lasted not a month, was annulled. I ask no questions, there are no answers anyway. I was delighted & relieved to see her, can you believe it? I am sure you can. I would ask her to come to Washington with me, but I cannot. She would not do it anyway, I am sure.

I've been having an affair with a woman from Cleveland, doesn't that sound shitty. I moved into a new apartment last week to escape her, but it didn't work, nothing ever does, she was here in fact when your letter arrived, breaking my back with protestations & prostrations. She wants to move in with her guitar & potter's wheel. Every man does the best he can. She has me nailed to the floor, the ceiling, I feel like a Chagall in glossy black & white. Your comments about love made me sigh. The grand passion is not for me, really, or anyone else. To hold hands & be quiet is enough. When the passion is grand it is not the woman you love but yourself.

/Listen, if I cannot go to France October next, I will try to visit you in SFran, okay? Have you wowed them, I dare say? What is there in the lit life besides *Howl*? And how is west

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coast pussy? Forgive me, I seem intent on being a fool this morning. The academy is yours if you want it, I am sure. I told Bracket in no jest that you would amount to something, pick your mark.

I had great ideas of joining the literary world here, I seem never to tire of hope, bless me, I would have a paper route if I didn't need my sleep, but I insulted everybody I met immediately & probably won't be president after all. I went, to my everlasting shame, to see Randall whatshisname, now the Poetry Consultant at the Library of Congress, you might have known, the one with the love-40 beard—this is the way the world ends, with Randall in his Mercedes Benz—and we hated one another instantly. He wished to know my favorite translation of Rilke. So there we sat & said not a word until finally I made the manners to leave.

/There is something the matter with this letter, I know not what, there is something the matter with me, I know not what, there is something the matter. I bore myself & others.

I am trying to write a poem about my father. You didn't know I had a father, did you? Neither did I. No wonder I cannot write the poem.

Your son looks like you, *mira*, you will forgive sentiment among old friends. That, frankly, as I am sure you know, is why I spoke of my father, of course there is no such person, never was—so that I could speak of your son. You must forgive me, this & everything. Of course you won't, and shouldn't, but you must.

I have faith in you, that is no bullshit, you are an artist, I am not. But think more about your personal person, Billy, Give up & then write.

cariño, paul

///There is a fellow here who has half a million to start an advertising firm, offers me 15 thou a year plus to join.///

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III

November 23, 1957/
Washington

Dear Bill:

I cannot tell what time is the right time or which words carry best. The fact is Kathleen and I were married a few days ago. Somehow we both expected this in a strange and unsaid way.

Very well, it is a fact and I ask your indulgence.

No one knows of this yet, just the immediate immediates. We will live in Washington.

More than this is perhaps only talk, for small hours, small mouths—Between men in matters of moment etc I believe simplicity is desirable.

I could scarcely say I am not anxious to hear your comment. Perhaps you are the only person I will ask for an opinion.

Very well, again, very well. If I sound dreadfully final about all this it is because, having reached the end of my thirtieth year, I am not lightly committed to this marriage, and being so accustomed to light commission I stand in danger of taking too much grim determination into it. I wish merely to live with Kathleen and of course the child and to try for the stability I have so far not achieved. Yes, certainly I am too grim. Maybe a short letter now is best. Certainly there will be a period of readjustment and you are part of it. I await your answer hopefully. It is not so much what you say now but what you finally come to think that is important to me.

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One expects politeness. We are all gravely polite, even Spanish in this respect at times./ I think we will be happy.

Let me hear.

love, Paul

December 2, 1957/
Washington

Dear Billy:

Perhaps we can talk someday about San Juan, as you say. Less happened there than I suspect you think. If I misled you by talking of Barbara and the woman from Cleveland, I did not mean to, certainly not consciously. What I said of them was the truth, and still is. What I have said to you, always, has been the truth, as I understood it at the time. You may not want to believe that, you may not be able to, but it is true. Even at that late date Kathleen and I had no plan to marry. I see nothing inconsistent between that and my saying that we had always known, in some strange way, from the first meeting in the hospital on...Perhaps it is too early to say exactly *what* we knew. I will talk about SJ anytime you wish, though I must say that I think it will prove at best pointless, perhaps a lot worse. It was certainly not my fault that you were nineteen years old.

love, Paul

December 9, 1957/
Washington

Dear Billy:

Everything that you say is true. But, as usual, you leave out half the story. If I misled you, it is because I misled myself. I was hoping that I would not have to point that out to you.

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It is indeed strange, as you say, for a man to speak as I did of Barbara one day, and the next marry another woman. It is not the first such strangeness I have known in this life. Nor, I fear, will it be the last. I hope only, now, for the first time, that it will not be *all* I know. That from time to time there will be something else, perhaps even something more, at least for a change. What, pray, do you propose that I *do* about this strangeness? Kill myself? Now that for the first time I have reason to say that I am happy, the courage to recognize it? I do not mean to suggest that I think it is by any means a witless proposal. It most certainly is not. It never has been. I am trying to tell you that I am in the process now, finally, of finding out what *else* I might do. I am not asking for you to help me, and will not—merely to let me do, to that end, what I can.

Paul.

December 15, 1957/
Washington

Dear Billy:

Thanks and so on for your good understanding. There are, by the way, just the two of us at the moment. As soon as we find an apartment suitable, Kathleen and I will drive over to Lexington and pick up the young man and whatever gear she thinks necessary. This week she is in Lexington by herself, for reasons best understood by a woman, making circles before lying down. She asks that nothing be said for a week or so, which I don't understand, but which is a small matter however understood, and I do everything I am asked. So, again, your indulgence, please. A lifetime is very bloody long and a week or so doesn't matter to me one way or the other.

What do you think of my eventual adoption of your son? I do think it probably best for the young man, especially when he starts school etc. Let me know how you feel about this

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and if all is agreeable I will proceed with the necessary papers etc. Lawyers, doctors, generals, the professionals of this world strike terror in me.

O, by the way, Kathleen withdrew from Indiana and from the academy in general for at least the next few years. I am very pleased at this.

Love, Paul // Let me hear something.

May 12, 1958/
Washington, D.C.

Come now, WBA, relax. My silence has been part sloth & part plan, which I suppose is the story of my life. The plan part was to permit the principals, i.e. Kathleen, her mother, you & the young man to jog around to your own separate ways of allowing a new player—Maybe I was just plain shirking my family duties but maybe not.

The money decision is not my sole province, not that I do not subscribe to Kathleen's position, that is not the question, rather that this and other matters are rightfully to be considered jointly—formerly by Kathleen and her mother, now by Kathleen and myself./ Your $25 check, by the way, cleared the second time around and something called a stroller was purchased by Kathleen. I hope the Bank of America con California has not thrown you in a white stucco jail or impounded your typewriter. In the future do not hesitate to ask for consideration in such matters. We are not so needy that arrangements cannot be made. It seems unavoidable that money will have to be discussed from time to time, among other sobrieties, and I wish to do it openly. I will not trust the cg to support us forever, I assure you. It is unfortunate that we are both for the time being without the necessary cash.//

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Here is a copy of my book. I see it from time to time lying about the apartment & fall into utter confusion. That this marriage & this book come to me together make portent beyond my poor mind, terrify me.

Love, Paul

Kathleen has contacted her lawyer in Lexington, and he will have the adoption papers drawn up shortly.

February 3, 1959/
NYC

Dear Bill:

Forgive this scrawl, but have put this off too long already. About the young man, can we wait? I am in midair, suspended, the dark, vast & middle. The time is not right, there is too much that is new, adjustments must be made, we all need more time. I think we all need more time. Kathleen is young & easily frightened.

I swore that I would never again live in New York. There are times when I understand everything, there are times when I understand nothing. The job is not as bad as I imagined. I meet serious people daily. I hope, before long, to get back to my own work, though I am past the point where I think it matters.

Kathleen and the young man are well.

The baby is recovering from a cold, her first of the season. Thank you for your thoughtfulness.

Each year I think that if I can just get through the winter sanity will return but of course it never does.

love & kisses, paul

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December 22, 1961/
New York

Dear Bill —

Kathleen and I have talked it over (which must be the shittiest way in the world to begin a letter) and we have decided that you should send no more money. She will cash this last check, and then that will be the last. I have a job, I am ashamed to say how much I am making, and it seems a fair bet now that I can keep it, or get a better one.

I always suspected that I would end up selling scented soap to housewives, it is why I could never kill myself. I make no apologies for Madison Avenue. It is every bit as awful as rumored, worse. But there are possibilities. I meet bright people daily. Even a few who have not sold their souls.

There is no reason for you to believe a word I say, I certainly do not.

A friend of a friend is setting the island poems to music. It will be performed at Wellesley College, so I am told.

I have a study in the attic. We live in last century elegance here on Staten Island. But children are largely unforgivable, especially my own. The young man is well, and happy enough I think. Kathleen is a decent mother, a very good one in fact. The trouble with a study is: it reminds me. And after a certain age one should not be reminded. I used to believe in a lot of things, the ham-red sun, and I still do, I still do. I am sorting old letters & broken ideas, cleaning up my study. Forgive my confusion, forgive me.

//I have an idea for a film, an inverted Christ story done in cowboys & indians—if I get enough money behind it would you be interested? Don't turn up your nose at films, Billy, you don't know what you are talking about.

Love, Paul

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Sept. 20, 1966/
Atlanta

Dear Bill—

I am sorry about all this, but it was unavoidable. Kathleen did not want to move again, and certainly I do not blame her. I have never been more or less than I am, irritable, selfish, pained at what I see and cannot see in time. I speak more often than not in a passion, we all know that. But do you know that I see you every morning at my breakfast, have for ten years now? You put your finger in my coffee & eat my cigarettes, you untie my shoes, you come out of the door as I go in. I shout at you & receive for answer the ultimate look, eyes quiet, not scornful. He is so much like you & the thing is, like you, quiet, gentle, complex, enigmatic. It is enough to drive me insane. But since I am insane already & accept the extranatural then ok, ok. I should adopt him, I should have adopted him years ago, but still I cannot. I try to be good to him, worrisome & protective, but we are all strange to one another still, still. Things are difficult to keep end to end. I do what I can, we all do what we can, and it is not good enough, not nearly good enough. I do not think, practically, I should adopt him until we settle down to one another.

The new child is a new child, what more can one say. I will come to love her I am sure, as I have the first. But all I can see now is that she has nothing between her legs, nothing.

Love, Paul

/Listen, the boy is fine, please don't worry. He wants to be a ballplayer like you. I must go & barbecue, can you believe it? I am sure you can.

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April 4, 1969/
Mt. Kisco

Dear Bill:

Kathleen called you before we had a chance to talk about it. If the young man needs a private school I will see to it that he goes to a private school. Under no circumstances are you to send money. You have your own family, and you are an artist. I am back in advertising. Money is not a problem. It is too early to tell exactly what the trouble is. He does not know himself why he behaves this way. Certainly he is bright and should have no trouble with classwork.

My quarrel with the poets like C—— is their use of naughty words. The trouble with civilized people is they have no understanding of manners or of anything else. Perhaps I should cut myself & sew the issue up in my mouth, what do you think? C—— with his shocking birdturds is among the twenty million on the other side of the TV, and I sell him too, whatever I choose. I am more cunning than Odysseus. I sell him Michelin tires for his TR-4 and he thinks because he knows what is happening it makes a difference. It does not. I think of the twenty million people stuck there night after night in the blue light, their empty eyes, their empty lives, waiting to be had. And I choose my words with care. There is even, I am sure you will grant me, a kind of truth in it, after all.

Yr. faithful servant,
Praeder

/Listen, about your novel, I'm delighted for you and all that. Perhaps I'll have more to say about it later. I can't say that I don't hate you because I do.

Love, Paul

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My Faithful Mother Tongue

Faithful mother tongue
I have been serving you.
Every night, I used to set before you little bowls of colors
so you could have your birch, your cricket, your finch
as preserved in my memory.

This lasted many years.
You were my native land; I lacked any other.
I believed that you would also be a messenger
between me and some good people
even if they were few, twenty, ten
or not born, as yet.

Now, I confess my doubt.
There are moments when it seems to me I have
squandered my life.
For you are a tongue of the debased,
of the unreasonable, hating themselves
even more than they hate other nations,
a tongue of informers,
a tongue of the confused,
ill with their own innocence.

But without you, who am I?
Only a scholar in a distant country,
a success, without fears and humiliations.
Yes, who am I without you?
Just a philosopher, like everyone else.

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I understand, this is meant as my education:
the glory of individuality is taken away,
Fortune spreads a red carpet
before the sinner in a morality play
while on the linen backdrop a magic lantern throws
images of human and divine torture.

Faithful mother tongue,
perhaps after all it's I who must try to save you.
So I will continue to set before you little bowls of colors
bright and pure if possible,
for what is needed in misfortune is a little order and beauty.

Berkeley, 1968

Veni Creator

Come, Holy Spirit,
bending or not bending the grasses,
appearing or not above our heads in a tongue of flame,
at hay harvest or when they plough in the orchards or
when snow
covers crippled firs in the Sierra Nevada.
I am only a man: I need visible signs.
I tire easily, building the stairway of abstraction.
Many a time I asked, you know it well, that the statue
in church
lift its hand, only once, just once, for me.
But I understand that signs must be human,
Therefore call one man, anywhere on earth,
Not me—after all I have some decency—
And allow me, when I look at him, to marvel at you.

Berkeley, 1961

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A Story

Now I will tell Meader's story; I have a moral in view.
He was pestered by a Grizzly so bold and malicious
That he used to snatch caribou meat from the eaves of
the cabin.
Not only that. He ignored men and was unafraid of fire.
One night he started battering the door
And broke the window with his paw, so they curled up
With their shotguns beside them, and waited for the dawn.
He came back in the evening, and Meader shot him at
close range,
Under the left shoulder blade. Then it was jump and run,
A real storm of a run: a Grizzly, Meader says,
Even when he's been hit in the heart, will keep running
Until he falls down. Later, Meader found him
By following the trail—and then he understood
What lay behind the bear's odd behavior:
Half of the beast's jaw was eaten away by an abscess,
and caries.
Toothache, for years. An ache without comprehensible
reason,
Which often drives us to senseless action
And gives us blind courage. We have nothing to lose,
We come out of the forest, and not always with the hope
That we will be cured by some dentist from heaven.

Berkeley, 1969

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The Separate Notebooks: Pages Concerning the Years of Independence

It is much easier to reach the Columbia River which empties into the Pacific, or to pitch a tent at the Athabaska River flowing to polar lakes, than to penetrate that zone marked by the zig-zag silver lines on the collar of his father's uniform. It is the spring of the year nineteen hundred twenty, they live on Embankment Street, just by the Church of Saint Jacob, and who would have supposed that one man could preserve inside himself, so vividly, that aroma of flowers, benches, vespers? In a britzka with a soldier on the driver's seat they ride along the Wilia to Antokol and beyond, out of town, where sappers have been stationed on the banks of the river. And everything is green, batteries painted that particular olive-green seen now for the first time, and an armored car, and the green outside the window when his father sings:

On the banks of the beautiful Loire,
There was my birth and my cradle.
Two kinds of goods flow from that land:
Beautiful ribbons and rifles.

What is that song about? About weapons sent from France? About an armored car? And they sing this, also:

At a far-away river, where he fell in battle,
A white rose blossoms on his grave.

And also on Embankment Street, only at its other end, close to the harbor, Mrs. Burchardt, standing on the left side—he remembers—of the piano, draws from her long neck the melody of another soldier's song, difficult to understand:

The echoes of cafes came back to him

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On the walls of houses by the Wilia he reads: "Pilsudski" and thinks, "Why did they write *ds* instead of *dz* as it should be in Polish?" And Mrs. Strawinski and Mrs. Niezabitowski; and Mary Pawlikowski's brother Dan who became an aviator; Witold is far away with his regiment of cavalry; Nina, that crazy girl, joined, they say, a unit of dragoons. When Dr. Swiezynski cut out his tonsils, it was painful, but for an instant only and then one was allowed to eat a lot of ice cream, something he remembers much later, sitting in the dentist's chair when Dr. Hallat laughs: "You certainly are no complainer!" Ice cream, cherries; summer is already here, larger and larger captions in the newspapers, more and more whispered conversations. Ever since, the breaking of the front has meant for him what his memory absorbed then: dusty roads under the glow of artillery fire, military trains, wandering, panics. The very idea of defeat will always be for him a scorched highway leading to Niemenczyn, packed with carts, wagons, britzkas. He will also be able to say, without distortion: I know how the streets of a city grow empty, while eyes peep from behind half-closed shutters. At dusk their wagon, loaded with belongings and fodder for the horses, climbs the serpentine curves of the road leading through Ponary towards Landwarow; when he looks back, the city is dark. What those serpentine curves in the road became for him later when he was a student, he cannot now recall precisely, nor can he verify the circumstances, for there is nobody to ask. It was long ago and all of them are dead. It should not be that way, but it is: even the silvery zig-zag lines on the collar of his father's uniform appear only when the melody of a little song returns:

On the banks of the river Loire,
There was my birth and my cradle.

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The war was over and the stars, serene.

The impoverished country of fields and poplars had managed to protect the wings of the storks nesting on its huts and the bread marked with a sign of the cross.

No one would be cutting down alleys of linden or surrounding villages at dawn to deport people in long trains to the East.

Artisans thatching roofs with straw, village blacksmiths, coopers preparing tubs for the cabbage-pickling season were constantly busy, as were musicians at weddings.

Everyday poverty was preserved, bare-footed little shepherds were making fires on the stubble, geese gaggled on the meadows, and wooden hoists at the wells creaked.

Black towns, that on fair-days wore multi-colored blankets and nibbled oats from a bag, were lighting candles at sundown on Friday.

Wooden spokes clattered at night through the fields, and a glow came from the sunsets, not from awakening cities.

A student from a Galician high-school, a farm-hand, a landowner's son and a young peasant lay under the sod, leaving their homelands to the doings of the King-Spirit.

The victor, a nobleman with a *ds* in his non-Polish name, was biting his moustache and saying nothing.

> *"He went out into the fields, black earth and rye*
> *Spread wide before his freedom-loving eye."*

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If only, as his father had done, he could busy himself with the rotation of crops, with planning the next day's work for servants and field hands!

"High-roofed front porches, floors of slick wet clay"

If only he had the power of the peasant-king, judge under the apple trees!

"In the silence before the dawn of life,
O golden rose, you lift me to yourself."

No State was truly his; no tribe desired his union of nations.

"And he, pursued by a great Genesic cry"

No country was his; there was only this other country, the one he got too late.

"I am like a beggar stopped on a road"

The stars over his head were not serene, but what he read in them would be of no avail to anybody.

A coffin under a white eagle deposited in the royal tombs, but the heart elsewhere, in his city, his own capital.

Such then was the inheritor of the Boleslavian crown—after whom again the homelessness of vanquished generations?

"As though a smile were the only thing we owed
These holy songs—and to their gift of blood"

↘

to Józef Czechowicz

It is possible that the dead do not need reports from the Earth and see in one symbol all that occurred later.

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Yet I presume you have some trace of interest, at least as to your own continued stay among the living.

Therefore I try to describe how you appear now, on this other continent, in the sudden lightning of your after-life.

A dark-haired young boy in a blue infantry uniform, a cap with a little white eagle, and puttees.

Because you were a soldier for two weeks in the Nineteen Twenty, and wrote about it, and the actors in your play were dressed in that same uniform.

That play which Horzyca succeeded in putting on stage, before our desks in that creaky office on Dabrowski Square disintegrated.

Before you perished from a bomb, Szulc in Auschwitz, Szpak from a bullet because he refused to be closed in the ghetto, Janina Wlodarkiewicz from a heart attack in New York.

So I am not surprised at your being dressed that way as you circle around me, when I record your poems in the Language Lab or play them back from a tape.

Lives taken away, lands defiled, sins: and your note, pure above the abyss.

From iron beds, rheumatic basements, disheveled basements and wailings, a calico misery,

From shit-houses in the yard, tomatoes on the window sill, vapor over bathtubs, greasy checkered notebooks—

How could that modest music for young voices soar, transforming the dark fields below?

Sleepy fields, some marigolds and mallows, in the garden of my *Matusia,* by dear Momma.

You were set apart by a flaw in your blood, you knew about Fate; but only the chant endures, nobody knows about your sorrow.

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And this is what tormented me in those years I lived after you; a question: where is the truth of unremembered things.

Where are you behind your words, and all who are silent, and a State now silent though it once existed.

Berkeley 1979

Translated from the Polish by
Czeslaw Milosz and Robert Pinsky

NOTE

The title of this poem refers to the years 1919 to 1939 when Poland, previously carved up by Russia, Germany, and the Austro-Hungarian empire, was, for a while, an independent state. The events in the opening section refer to the 1920 War between the newly independent Polish state and the Soviet Union. The first line of the second section refers to the peace which followed. There are three crucial figures in the poem. Józef Pilsudski (1867-1935) led the Polish Army in the 1920 War and became premier (and virtual dictator) of the Polish state between 1926 and his death in 1935. Juljusz Slowacki (1809-49) is present implicitly. A major poet of the romantic period, he died before completing his epic work, *The Spirit-King (Król Duch)*, which imagines a legendary pre-historic Poland and which Milosz has woven into his portrait of Pilsudski. Józef Czechowicz (1903-39), a brilliant young poet and playwright, a colleague of Milosz's at Polish Radio in Warsaw, died at the beginning of World War II. Thus, his brief career coincided with the years of Independence.

Another word about Pilsudski. Like Milosz, he was born in Lithuania; hence the spelling of his name. As a Lithuanian, his political vision was somewhat different from that of most Poles. He hoped to create a republic based not on the fervent nationalism of the period, but on the federal model of the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which included many different nationalities and languages—Poles, Jews, Lithuanians, Byelorussians, etc. In this, he failed. At his death his body was interred in the royal tombs in Kraków, and his heart, in a separate ceremony, at Wilno. **R.P.**

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Portfolio

Drawings

Louisa Chase

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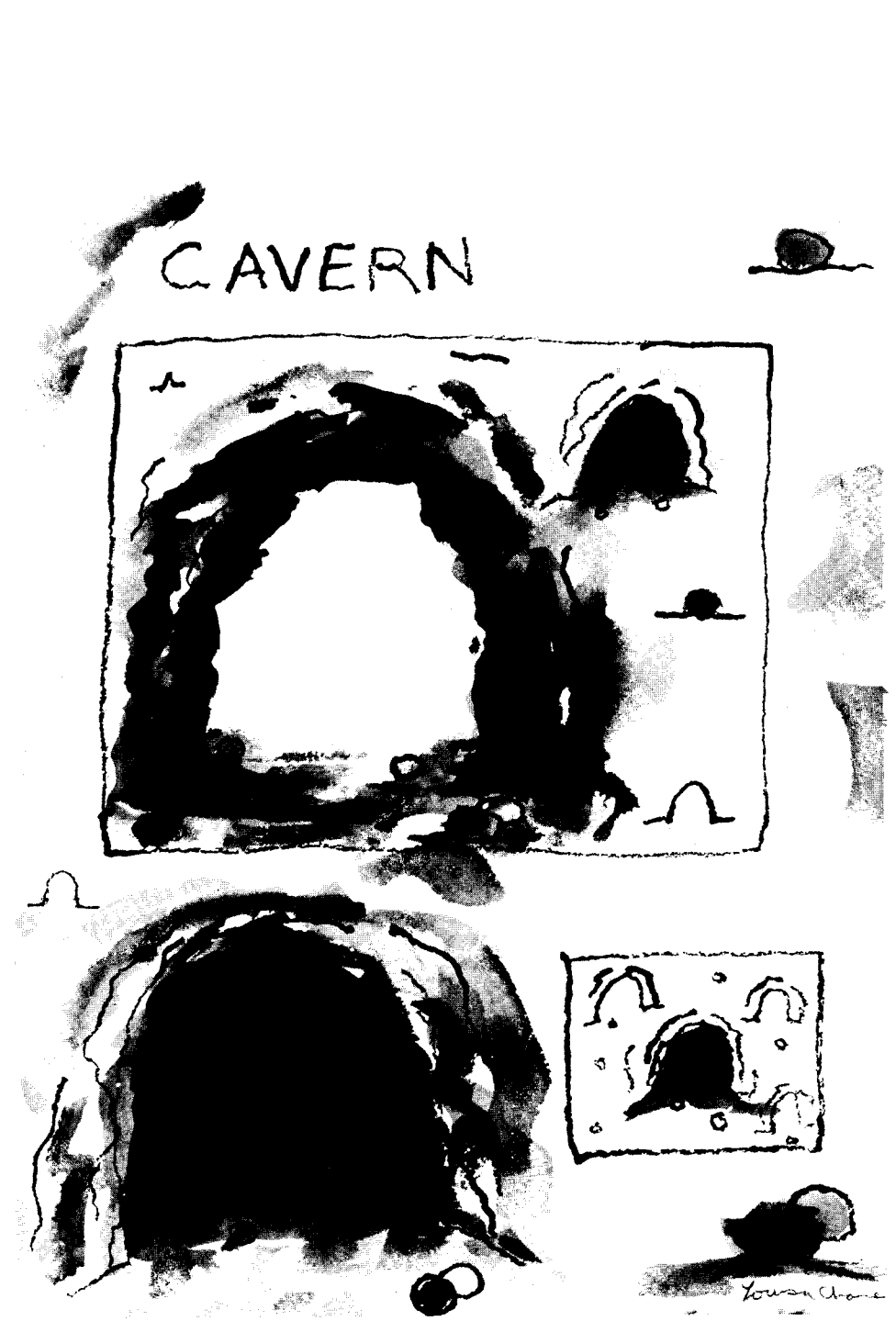

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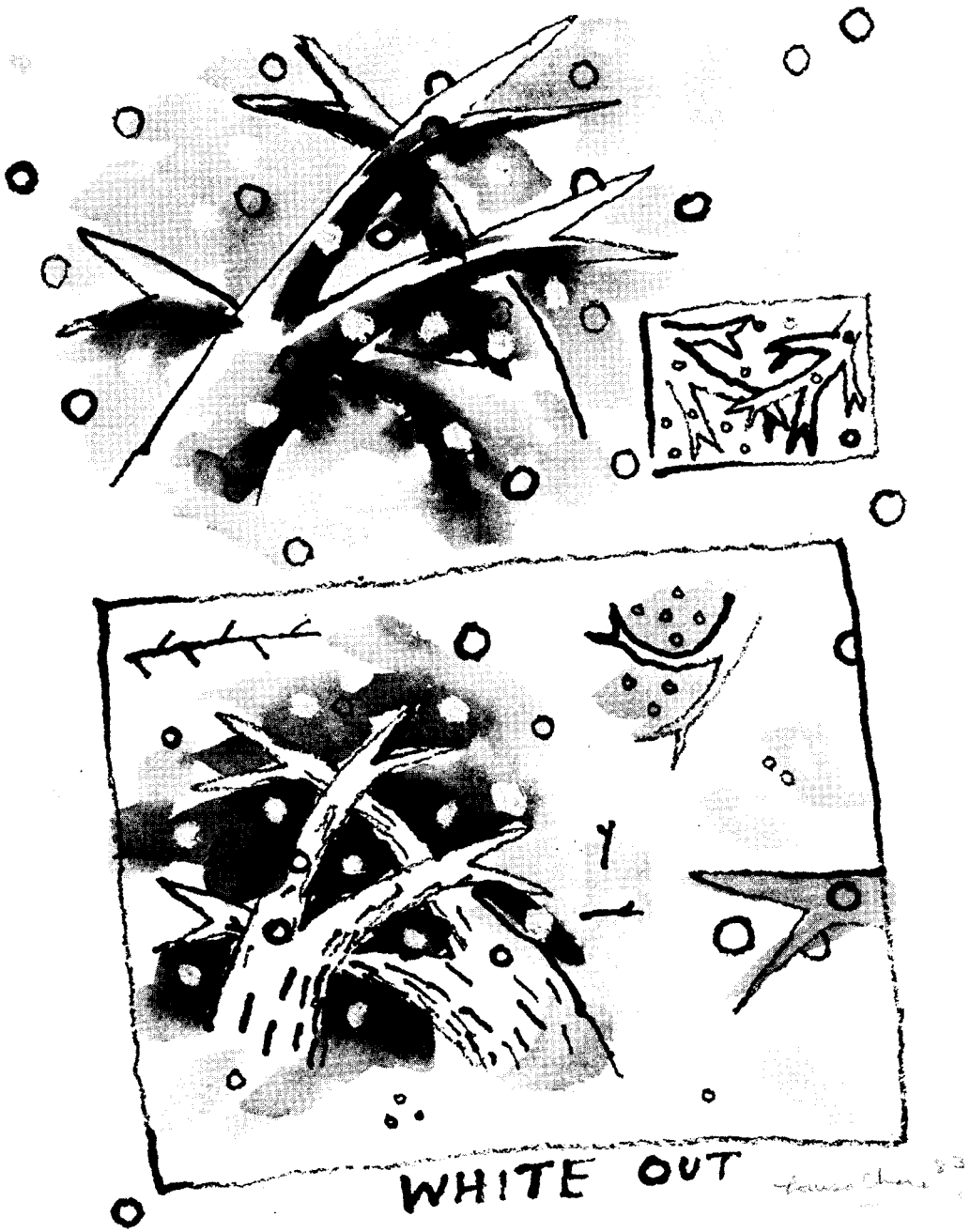

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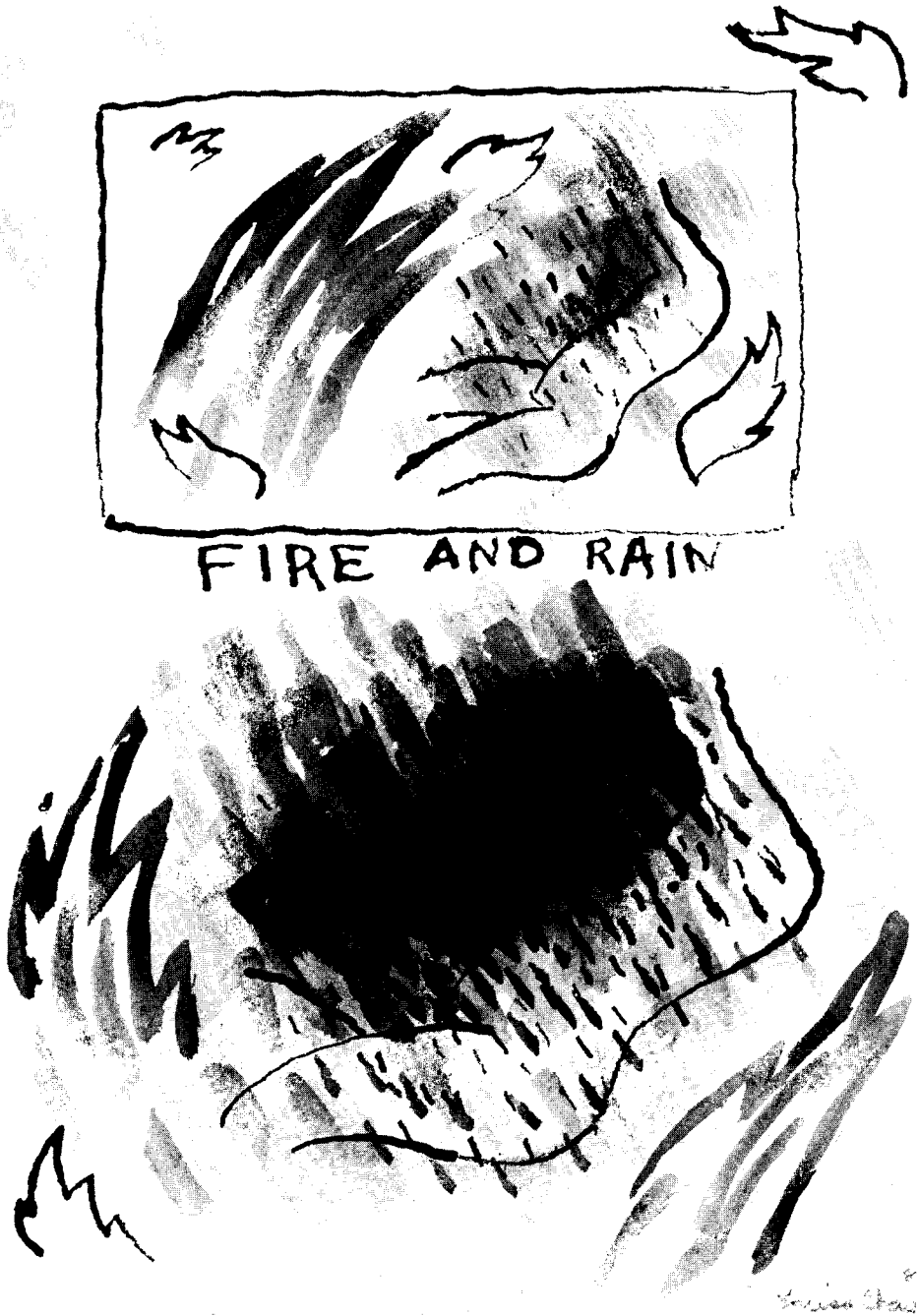

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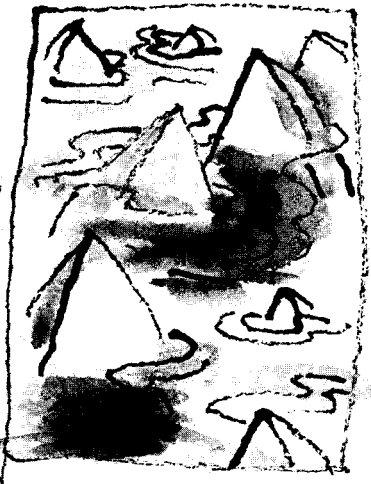

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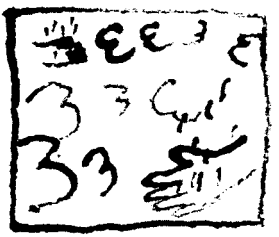

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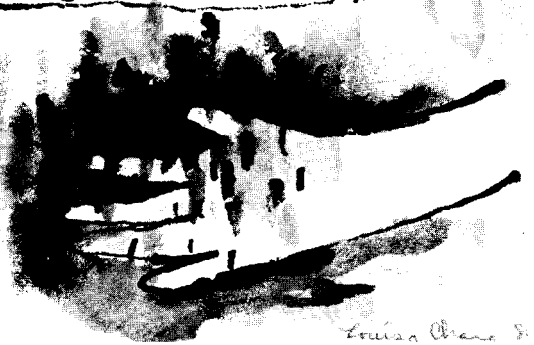

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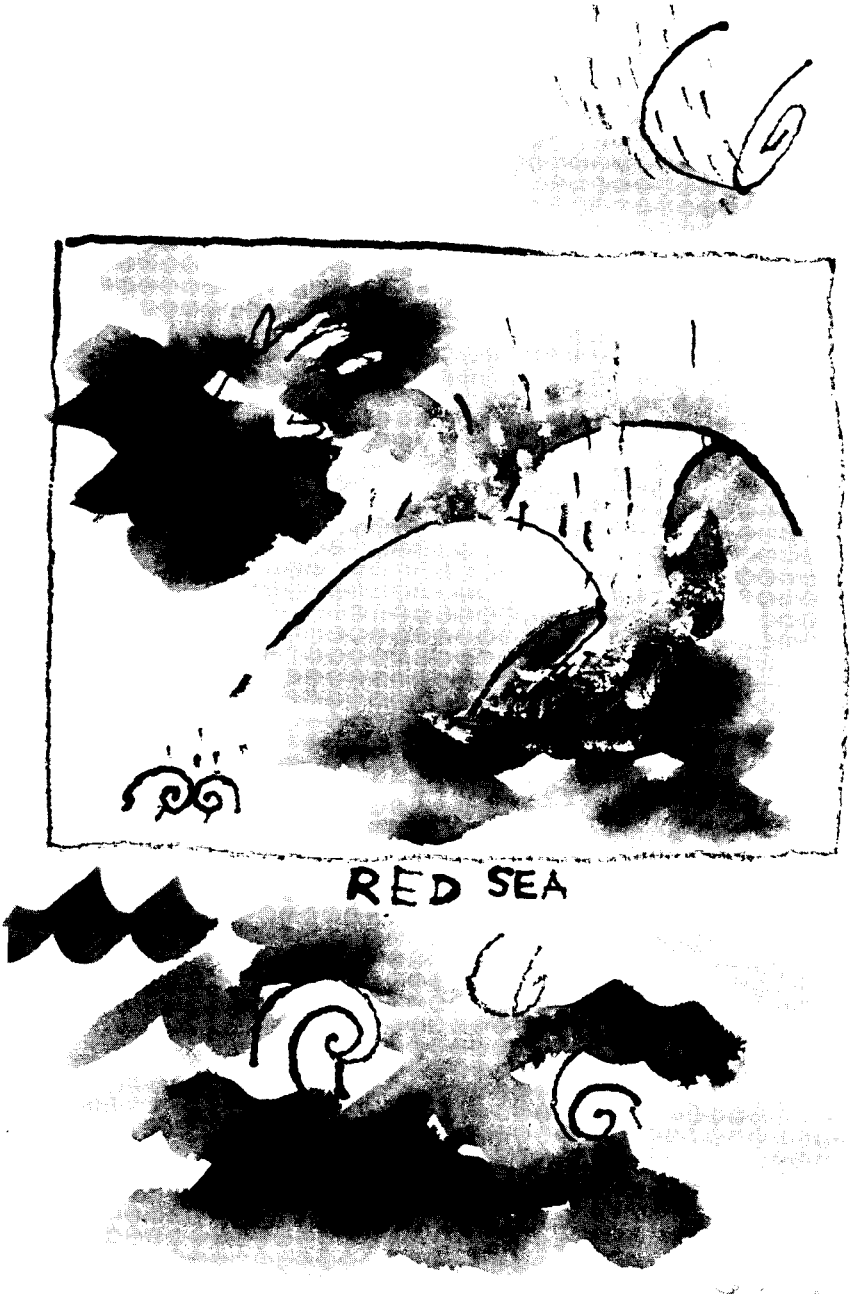

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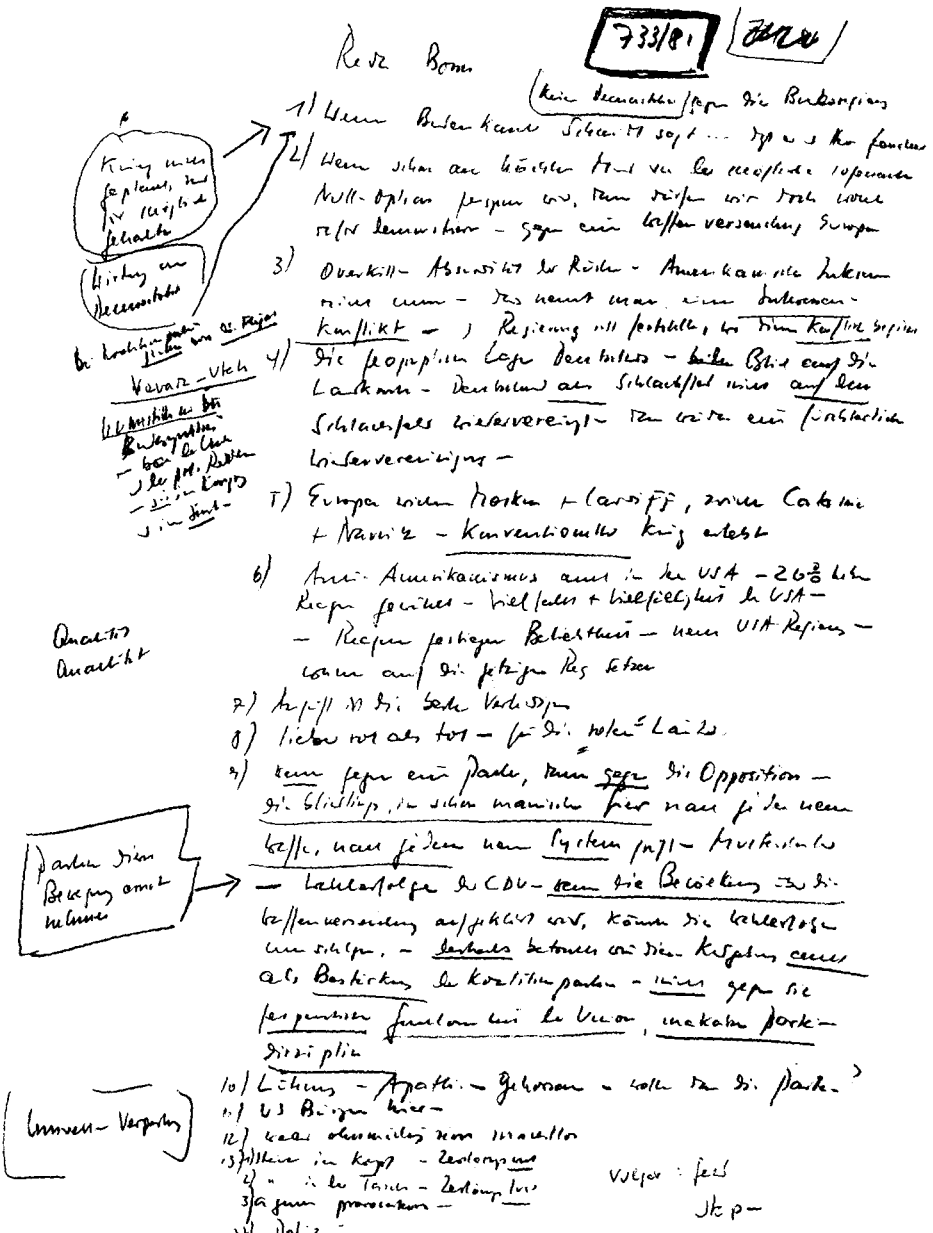

A Heinrich Böll manuscript page from Vermintes Gelände *published in 1982.*

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The Art of Fiction LXXIV

Heinrich Böll

After riding a streetcar through the green fields and meadows south of Cologne, the interviewer got out at the small station at Merten and gave a taxi driver an address: "Oh, you're going to see Böll," was the immediate comment. The address was a three-storied, nondescript and unadorned brick building. After standing at a wooden gate with no apparent latch, the interviewer was hailed from a porch above by a balding, somewhat florid-faced man who called out: "Simply push the top board to the right."

Once inside, Heinrich Böll welcomed the interviewer with a hearty handshake; he introduced Annemarie Böll—his helpmate and wife of almost forty years—and led the way into a dark living room filled with overstuffed chairs and couches. Böll recently sold his residence of many years in Cologne to move near the Lamuv Verlag, an enterprise of one of his sons, where Böll himself lends a hand as an editor and advisor to the fledgling publisher.

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The writer, wearing a rumpled suit with no tie, moved slowly and spoke softly. When he and the interviewer had settled themselves, Böll leaned forward and said, "Let's simply talk with one another." His remark set the tone for the relaxed conversation that followed.

INTERVIEWER

I think of surprises in your works which startle the reader, as in *Adam, Where Art Thou?* where the protagonist is killed on the last page. Or in *Group Portrait with Lady*, where the reader waits in suspense for the meeting of the narrator with Leni Pfeiffer, and when it does happen, there are only a few words about it. What kind of function do such surprises play? Did you contrive such surprises on purpose?

BÖLL

No, I don't think so. In *Group Portrait with Lady* the reason is possibly—I emphasize the *possibly*—that the narrator has been very aloof during the whole book. He has become a researcher, collecting impressions, facts, moods, and also events, and therefore he probably shrinks from the encounter. In *Adam, Where Art Thou?* there is very possibly an experiential component. I spent the last months of the war here in the western part of Germany before I became a prisoner of the Americans, and I observed that houses where a white flag had been put out were often shot at by the Germans. With the advance of the American army, villages and small towns between the fronts waited for the American army, and raised the white flag; that was prohibited, prohibited on penalty of death. Naturally, with the shifting of the fronts, the occupation of some villages changed; those houses with white flags hanging out were fired on by the German army or at least by certain units. Therefore, the white flag had a personal significance for me; possibly—I no longer know exactly what I had in mind at the time—it was the thought of being killed at the last moment that brought me to end the story that way. It happened to a lot of people. Here in the Rhineland there was a whole wave of executions of deserters, about which very little is known even yet. They were hanged

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from trees; they were shot to death on the spot. There was a kind of arbitrary jurisdiction. I believe there was a mandate by Hitler that anyone could shoot anyone else whom he considered a deserter from the colors. And I was myself, with my brother, a deserter in the last months of the war and lived in the constant fear: "Will we get away with it? Will we get out of this alive, survive it?" Then, in order to escape this peril—it seemed to me the safest way—I went back to the army. During that fortnight or so in the armed forces before I came into American captivity, I often observed what happened to the white flags. And certainly for me—a deserter from the colors who was frightened for his life—that was significant to me. It wasn't just a capricious ending.

INTERVIEWER

I was with that soldier in front of his door, where a white flag was flying, and when I turned the page there was the sudden, surprising moment. I almost collapsed myself.

BÖLL

I remember one young man, a noncommissioned officer, who left the front to go drink coffee with his mother. She lived only four kilometers or so away. He was shot as a deserter.

INTERVIEWER

But he wasn't one?

BÖLL

That was not clear. He wasn't militaristic or an enthusiastic soldier, but he had gone away only four or five kilometers to visit his mother, and they shot him. Such things happened. On a visit to Cologne in March 1945, after a heavy bombing I met hundreds and hundreds of deserters who were squatting in the rubble, many in the deep cellars left from Roman times. They had been hiding there after the retreat from France. They lived by selling cigarettes on the black market, by bartering, and so on. People like these, who fled the war and were nevertheless killed at the last moment, are indeed significant. The white flag is a very important motif.

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I still remember keeping my father from putting out the white flag too early. He always had his handkerchief and a broomstick ready and, long before the Americans came, he wanted to put them out; and we said: "Now watch it, that could turn out bad, don't do that too soon." So you can see what the white flag means to me.

INTERVIEWER

For a long time I've noticed that throughout your works there is a considerable emphasis on arrivals and departures...the train station a focal point.

BÖLL

Oh, yes. I suppose that's also related to the war, to hundreds of departures and farewells which could always be final. Nobody knew: "Will we see one another again?" I experience this metaphysics of farewell even to this day when I leave someplace, when I change localities, which I unfortunately do very often. The farewell is always conceivably a final one. Even when I travel from the house we have in the country to this house, where we live officially, so to speak, I have to pack; I have to climb into a car or a taxi. It's always difficult to depart; the realistic aspect does not exclude the metaphorical one—the interpretation that here on earth we find ourselves in a waiting room.

INTERVIEWER

You could say: Meeting Place Earth, couldn't you?

BÖLL

Yes, you could say that. But I long for the time of no more departures. It has something to do with age probably.

INTERVIEWER

I think of Hans Schnier in *The Clown*—how he sits there on the steps.

BÖLL

Within the absurd events of war there is always a constant back-and-forth, a constant change from here to there. You get put into another train and shipped off; you arrive some-

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where, stay only a couple of days, and then you are again shipped off—this absurd line of movement brought about by war. If you translate that into all the people, whether civilian or soldier, there's something like fugitive flight involved.

INTERVIEWER

Only in wartime?

BÖLL

It was there before. The threat posed by those in power, the Nazis, was always that of having to leave. You could be arrested, you could be taken away. Also the economics of the time meant that we moved around a lot. The fear of not being able to pay the rent was deeply lodged, very deeply. Just imagine a boy of ten or twelve who has no clear concept of economic matters but knows only: "Oh, God, I hope we can pay the rent or we'll be thrown out." All of that is related. My father owned several houses—we had one that he had to sell because of the Depression. The deluge came a year later when a bank failed. We had to get out of our house. It was auctioned off. And with that the fear began: "Do you have a place to live? Do you have a bed?" Later, with my own sons, it has always been my main concern to have a home for them, and a bed, and a blanket. It's all connected with that. A train station is not a home, you know. Nor is a waiting room, and least of all the army barracks.

INTERVIEWER

You have sometimes been compared with Hemingway. Do you think that is justified?

BÖLL

Not entirely. I was influenced in regard to form, that's very obvious. His style was for us an enormous surprise, and we were fascinated because apparently—I emphasize *apparently*—he was so superficial...such a contrast to our famous German profundity. But behind this apparent, let's say almost journalistic, superficiality one can perceive a depth. Where I differ completely from him is in his trauma of

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masculinity—it probably *was* a trauma in his case—or this hero worship, virility worship! I never liked that. It had no appeal for me; it was distasteful to me. Nonetheless, his means of expression were so important.

INTERVIEWER

You and your wife had something to do with the success in Germany of J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*.

BÖLL

Well, it had been translated, and indeed very well, but it wasn't a success. It hadn't even been noticed. It had been done by a Swiss publisher. We compared the translation with the English original, and discovered that, for reasons of censorship of one kind or another, some parts had been left out. The Swiss do a lot of censoring—especially references to sex and anti-militaristic things. So we looked for a new publisher, actually our own, and after convincing him—which was very difficult, he didn't want to do it at all—we redid *The Catcher in the Rye*, checking through it, correcting a bit, and adding what had been left out. And we did translate other works by Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* and *Raise High the Roofbeam, Carpenters*.

INTERVIEWER

Have you met Salinger personally?

BÖLL

No. It must be difficult.

INTERVIEWER

Could you have hidden yourself from society behind a wall, as he has done?

BÖLL

No. But I think that has to do with German history. I could imagine, if the Nazis, the war, and postwar political developments had not happened that I might have led a very secretive life. But as a citizen of the Federal Republic and as a German I could not manage that. Sometimes I try to do it, to become a kind of mixture of Irishman and Oblomov—

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an Irish Oblomov—but I can't do it. Of course, I can understand Salinger's reclusiveness very well. I also respect it completely.

INTERVIEWER

You once had very large printings of your works in Russia, even larger than in the United States. Do you know anything about the Russian translations?

BÖLL

There's a book about that by an American Slavic scholar, Henry Glade, who has written at length about the reception of my work in the Soviet Union. He checked the translations in part with a Russian-German scholar, a translator, and the results were awful. I become very anxious when I think about the way I was introduced there, and that now it's all been coarsened. So that the Russian readers must be to some extent bewildered, they can't understand: "My God, what's gotten into him?" It's a very sad story.

INTERVIEWER

Are you read in Russia as much today as you were?

BÖLL

Well, my books have not been published since 1972, the main reason being the occupation of Czechoslovakia when I expressed my views very energetically.

INTERVIEWER

You weren't in Prague at the time?

BÖLL

I was there on the day the invasion took place, yes. I experienced it with Czech friends, and my viewpoint, in interviews and what I wrote myself, was so unequivocal that I was the "bad boy" for a long time. In 1972 a small volume of stories appeared in Russia, but nothing since then. My books are no longer for sale either, except on the black market in Moscow.

INTERVIEWER

And the fact that you welcomed Solzhenitsyn when he came out certainly didn't help.

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BÖLL

Probably not. And others have come since then. But even after Solzhenitsyn was with us, I have been in the Soviet Union. I travel there occasionally still.

INTERVIEWER

I suppose you have money in the Soviet Union.

BÖLL

No, no, that's not a factor. And there isn't much, very little.

INTERVIEWER

You have been translated quite a lot. What is important to an author about his translator? Do you hear critical echoes?

BÖLL

The only ones I can judge are the English translations. And even in that case not accurately. My most interesting correspondence is with my translators. I marvel at their sensitivity over certain passages that just anyone, even if he knows German well, would not appreciate. Of course, the Russian translators never queried me about anything; but the French, the Italians, and the English correspond with me at times so that I can clarify certain expressions for them, certain situations; that gives me a lot of pleasure. I like that a lot.

INTERVIEWER

I suppose you learn something from that yourself.

BÖLL

Yes, of course. You have to explain historical things, especially small details, minute things. It was so complicated during the Nazi era. No, no, that's a lot of fun for me.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think is humorous in your works?

BÖLL

What do I think? What do *you* think?

INTERVIEWER

I find humor even in your serious situations and circum-

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stances. For instance, do you smell things over the telephone the way the clown does in *The Clown?*

BÖLL

No, unfortunately not.

INTERVIEWER

Then how did Hans Schnier get the idea that he could smell over the telephone?

BÖLL

I don't know.

INTERVIEWER

You don't know.

BÖLL

No, really, I don't. Humor is really one of the hardest things to define, very hard. And it's very ambiguous. You have it or you don't. You can't attain it. There are terrible forms of professional humor, the humorists' humor. That can be awful. It depresses me because it is artificial. You can't always be humorous, but a professional humorist must. That is a sad phenomenon.

INTERVIEWER

That's not the same thing as being a clown.

BÖLL

Oh no, not at all.

INTERVIEWER

Humor for him is something superficial.

BÖLL

Yes, but that's an illusion. Basically it is the expression of deep melancholy. Many clowns end up in deep melancholia, too. I don't know what you're getting at—that you discover humor in my work?

INTERVIEWER

I have in mind Dr. Murkes's silence from *Murkes's Collected Silences*. It wasn't silence at all.

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BÖLL

Yes, that may be.

INTERVIEWER

And the story, "The Throw-away Man."

BÖLL

Yes, that's wicked.

INTERVIEWER

It may be wicked, but you aimed well. Certainly we live in a society where a lot is thrown away.

BÖLL

Paper mainly. I don't know whether "The Throw-away Man" is humor, I don't know. I had a lot of trouble making that story work.

INTERVIEWER

How does a work start? What is the first thing that comes to mind? Is it an image—or a character, or a social situation?

BÖLL

It begins with one person (at the most two) in a specific situation that produces conflict and tension. How much "breathing space" or length is determined by the number of persons who necessarily become involved.

INTERVIEWER

Does a work change from your original concept of it as you go along?

BÖLL

In my case, the work changes constantly, since I seldom have a firm plot or any idea at all about the ending. But there is a clear, almost mathematically conceptual idea that determines length—the length or brevity of a literary work being comparable to the size of the frame needed by a picture.

INTERVIEWER

For whom do you write? Do you have an imaginary reader?

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BÖLL

My "imaginary reader" can be "uneducated," but with a vacillating optimism that sometimes approaches pessimism. I still consider language to be a means of communication with this reader. Even complicated events—which form topics in essays or reviews—are communicable to the "uneducated" reader.

INTERVIEWER

What is the most difficult aspect of writing for you?

BÖLL

Well, considering my "imaginary reader," it's being able to be understood without having to compromise by making something easy that isn't easy, or by making something unnecessarily difficult when it is easy in the first place.

INTERVIEWER

Did receiving the Nobel Prize change your life?

BÖLL

When I got the Nobel Prize I said to myself that it had made me neither smarter nor more stupid. I said, too, that we Germans have never been an unimaginative people, and so I was pleased about receiving the Prize. The Nobel Prize has not changed my personal life. Since it is generously endowed, it was very welcome financially. I bought a large prewar apartment in Cologne, where I no longer reside, however.

INTERVIEWER

Are there any rituals that get you going on a literary project?

BÖLL

When I am involved in an extensive project there is no ritual—I go to work and write until weariness forces me to stop. With shorter projects I shirk: I straighten up my desk and then straighten it up again, read the newspaper, take a walk, tidy up my bookshelves, drink coffee or tea with the lady I'm married to, smoke a lot, let myself be diverted with

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visitors, telephone calls, even the radio—and then at the last moment I am literally forced to begin, jumping on a train, if you will, that's already pulling out of the station.

INTERVIEWER

In your remarks at the acceptance of the Nobel Prize in Stockholm you described your table. Do you have the table in this house?

BÖLL

No, I have it in the study in my other house.

INTERVIEWER

Can you work without that table?

BÖLL

Yes. But not well. I work best at that table.

INTERVIEWER

Is it a large table?

BÖLL

No, it's very small. So big.

INTERVIEWER

And the typewriter you mentioned?

BÖLL

I still have it. "Travelwriter Deluxe," manufactured in 1957. But it rattles a lot now, and I sometimes think it's not going to last much longer.

INTERVIEWER

Will you get an electric one?

BÖLL

I can't work with a motor around. The typewriter is for me really an instrument.

INTERVIEWER

Something like a pencil?

BÖLL

Well, I'd like to say, as terrible as it sounds, something

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like a musical instrument. I forget that I'm sitting at a machine.

INTERVIEWER

Do you type with all your fingers?

BÖLL

No, no, with six, seven. I never learned how, and I always make a lot of mistakes. They are corrected then by the lady to whom I'm married, or I do it myself. I have to have my hand on the actual writing till the end. I can't dictate. The process of writing on the typewriter is a productive process for me. I'm so used to this machine; it has a certain rhythm; I'll have a hard time bidding it farewell. But an electric one is unthinkable. I can't have a motor on my writing table, you know—it would buzz a little, no?

INTERVIEWER

Also in your remarks in Stockholm you said that language and the power of imagination were the same thing. What did you mean by that?

BÖLL

That behind every word a whole world is hidden that must be imagined. Actually, every word has a great burden of memories, not only just of one person but of all mankind. Take a word such as bread, or war; take a word such as chair, or bed or Heaven. Behind every word is a whole world. I'm afraid that most people use words as something to throw away without sensing the burden that lies in a word. Of course, that is what is significant about poetry, or the lyric, in which this can be brought about more intensively than in prose, although prose has the same function.

INTERVIEWER

With your political and socio-critical stances—I am thinking of such militant radicals as Ulrike Meinhof and the criticism you have expressed about the press—you have sometimes made yourself unpopular among your colleagues and...

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BÖLL

...everywhere.

INTERVIEWER

...everywhere. Why have you done that?

BÖLL

I didn't do it to be unpopular, but rather because—it comes back to what we were just talking about—the unimaginative use of words upsets me. Put very simply: in the case of Ulrike Meinhof* and her comrades, they were called murderers before murder was proven against them. I consider that to be outrageous. I remind myself that this kind of slander, practiced here recklessly, not only by some of the most prominent publishers, but by others as well, makes me think of the press campaign of the Nazis against Jews, Communists, and then, later, against church circles. Actually, my excitement or really my anger, was just my way of saying: "Hold on here!" All of this is linked with my attitude toward the word, toward words. It was always a matter of words. I picked out a word and showed what lay behind it and what can be caused by its misuse. Many of my colleagues did not understand; they thought: "My God, he's supporting the terrorists," which was not the case at all; but they concocted it out of everything I wrote. Then some of my words were quoted falsely, which put me and my family into a very difficult situation. Always, it was a matter of words. I consider that to be the task of being preoccupied with language. Particularly in our own history. As a young man I read the *Stürmer* and that damned Nazi press here, which made not only the Jews the subject of their evil propaganda, but other groups in society as well—homosexuals, Catholic priests, and, it goes without saying, Communists. So I'm just as sensitive when a group of people is defamed today by being called names, especially in the light

*Ulrike Meinhof led a terrorist group in the 70s which tried to effect social change through bank robbery and political assassination. She and several of her co-conspirators died in prison under mysterious circumstances.

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of our own political history; don't forget that many of the defamers were overzealous, quickly-converted democrats who—let's say—in March 1945 were Nazis and in October 1945 were already flaming democrats. I mistrust them. I believe that democracy is based on lengthy processes. You can't become a democrat quite so quickly. All of that is related. I don't regret it, don't regret it: well, some things I said, in my rage, and also because I felt alone, were stupid things, too, fine, but the process was necessary.

INTERVIEWER

Have you expressed an opinion about what has been happening in Poland?

BÖLL

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

I assume that has bothered you.

BÖLL

Yes, it not only has bothered me, it has upset me terribly, and it still does. I don't think it's all over yet. Oh, that will be bitter. I hope there's not a civil war, but I can't believe that such a development, such a movement, which proceeds not only from the Communist intellectuals but also from the workers, will be so easily suppressed. I have expressed my opinion about it, very energetically, and I was praised by people whom I find sinister, who give me the creeps. Such hypocrisy. Take that word *solidarity*: it has three dimensions, first a word, then a concept, and finally the name of a movement—all pointing to the fact that solidarity is not divisible. Yet I can't have solidarity with Poland, nor with the creeps, nor with Haiti, if you see what I mean. That's where the hypocrisy begins, right here. How many people here are suddenly for free trade unions who have always fought against free trade unions? Oh, well, all right. Then too, I naturally had trouble with certain leftist circles here. But the clarification was necessary.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think of history as lies?

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BÖLL

Always newly refined. Well, you must distinguish between history and the writing of history. History has a more or less verifiable course, which can almost never be reconstructed, never precisely, and that results in what can be called a lie, or better, an untruth, or an inaccuracy. Most historians rely too much on accessible sources. Of course, that's legitimate. What else is a historian to do? He goes to the sources, he looks into the files of the Reichskanzlei or the British Foreign Office, he inspects the correspondence of someone with someone else, compares this with what happened next, but at every point there is the possibility of making a mistake. After all, there are falsified facts. What *cannot* be ferreted out is what might be false or deceptive in an official document that Churchill writes to Stalin or Hitler to Mussolini or whatever, and that is already not true. I suspect that the writing of history is simply burdened with many mistakes of this sort, loaded, as it were.

INTERVIEWER

Do you mean that truth itself is hard to find, even when it exists? Well, then how does one find truth? Are there truths in a novel, for example?

BÖLL

Yes, there can be, human truths. Many novels convey more insight than scholarly works. Let me give an example: in South America, from Sábato in Argentina to Asturias in Guatemala, straight across the board, there are so many authors, Vargas Llosa, García Márquez and so on, hundreds of them—and it is through them that a mediated impression of this subcontinent comes very close to truth. Of course, I can't restrict myself to one author. Truth must be assembled. In Germany after the war, 1945 to 1960 or 1970, naturally, there's not just one novel that can give that to you, but twenty—*Pattern of Childhood* by Christa Wolf, *The Tin Drum* by Günter Grass, Uwe Johnson's novels, Koeppen. We can't enumerate them, but perhaps all together they write the truth about that epoch. History and fiction must complement one another. And added to that is painting, music,

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especially architecture...indeed everything that the period produced is a part of it. Truth certainly exists, but it is very hard to put together, it's always an assembled truth; historical writing is a part of it, too, but I don't believe it can deliver the whole truth. I found one example very striking. Rolf Hochhuth wrote about the young Swiss, named Bavaud, I think, who wanted to assassinate Hitler. The people whom Hochhuth wanted to refute came forward with official documents of the Secret Police, which sounded very sober and clear, and said: "Look, So-and-so said this, he did this and that—it's all in the documents." But how do we know that the documents weren't falsified? After all, in any court proceeding you find the judge saying: "That goes into the record but that doesn't." Or is it different in America?

INTERVIEWER

Oh no.

BÖLL

If you can't even discern the truth in a petty theft or a divorce case, you're going to have the same problem with the sources when you sit down to write history.

INTERVIEWER

You have to be careful with sources.

BÖLL

Take an interrogation, a questioning. What does the official write down, how does he formulate it—the linguistic expression is very decisive—what does he leave out? Not much is left.

INTERVIEWER

Well, does truth exist?

BÖLL

Yes, there is, finally, a truth about this theft, or about that marriage that has gone to ruin. But it's not necessarily found in the documents. Maybe in a novel.

INTERVIEWER

You speak of the importance of a word's meaning and truth. Aren't words inexact at best?

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BÖLL

Language is more solid than music and painting. Yet it is "inexact." But the fact that a word has a multiplicity of meaning, not only within a language but also outside of it, makes it important to try to get to the root of words and language. That is the constant striving of literature. The absolute meaning exists somewhere; we just haven't found it yet.

INTERVIEWER

What induces you to set to work?

BÖLL

Well, first of all the desire to express something special in language. But there are various inducements, aren't there? There's the purely linguistic beginning. A sentence occurs to me, or a situation.

INTERVIEWER

Would you start with a title?

BÖLL

No. The title comes afterwards, usually with considerable difficulty. I remember that *The Train Was on Time* had a totally different working title; it was called *Between Lemberg and Czernowitz*. The publisher said, "My God, two place names." I was persuaded to change it, but not against my will; I agreed to it then. A working title often changes.

INTERVIEWER

Can you describe your usual workday?

BÖLL

Mine? That's been difficult in the last few years because I was ill for a long time and actually still am. Normally I work mornings, from after breakfast until about half-past twelve, and then again in the afternoon, and in the evening as well, if I really get going. There are, unfortunately, quite a few interruptions—not unimportant ones, correspondence and the like—that make steady work difficult.

INTERVIEWER

Do you write without much revision?

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BÖLL

Oh, no, I revise everything, very often. Even when I am writing a short article of let's say, two typewritten pages, it will have four or five versions.

INTERVIEWER

Do you write to the end and then read it through again?

BÖLL

Yes; then I make corrections or notes with a pencil or a ballpoint and work through it again, improve it, add to it. No, it happens very seldom, unfortunately, that I just dash something off. Of course, often the really decisive thought doesn't come until later. Sometimes, I start writing and suddenly the thought arrives, maybe on the third page, and then I throw away the rest and start with that. It's a good thing to keep on writing. A lot that happens at the back has to be moved to the front.

INTERVIEWER

Are the names of your characters important to you?

BÖLL

Yes, very. Very definitely. I can't begin, if I don't know the name. That's my problem at the moment. I have a plan in mind, something, a novel. I should have five or six names already, that I don't have yet. Certainly I can help myself out—and that's not bad either—just by calling them all Schmitz, just to get going. But I can't think about names too much.

INTERVIEWER

There are no names with meaning in your work? Where the name...

BÖLL

...refers to the occupation? No, I don't like that. I find that awkward, because you ought not mark a person's name up against him. It's an awkward mistake to try to make a name significant or characteristic of the person in question. The name of a person is really sacrosanct to me. A lot of

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things are ruined because I can't find a name. Sometimes I improvise on the typewriter, just as one improvises on the piano. I think, well, it starts with a D, then I put down an E, and then an N and so forth. So then he's named Denger or some such name.

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever been blocked, unable to write, and if so, how did you get going again?

BÖLL

Inhibitions or blocks have recently become second nature with me. It has to do with the situation on earth. I live in a country which has the greatest concentration of atomic weapons on earth—and now more masses of new atomic weapons are to be added. That can take away your breath, and your enjoyment of life, and give you pause about whether writing makes any sense. For a time music, classical music, helped me to overcome a block—Beethoven's *breath*, for example, in which I sense something very West European and Rhine-like. The persistent problem with my writing is that I never know how something is going to come out; even when I write a short review, I always have to start all over. I have no mastery.

INTERVIEWER

But is that not a fatal realization to a writer?

BÖLL

It's actually beneficial—it prevents things from becoming routine.

INTERVIEWER

What would you like to see changed in the world?

BÖLL

In the world?

INTERVIEWER

Yes.

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BÖLL

One question that has concerned me very much is: To whom does the earth belong?

INTERVIEWER

Would you call yourself an optimist?

BÖLL

Me?

INTERVIEWER

Yes.

BÖLL

I'm both.

INTERVIEWER

Pessimist and optimist at the same time?

BÖLL

Mine is the optimism of the survivor; the feeling of having survived is very often horrible when you realize how many didn't. I'm still whole, still here—that is one of my driving forces, the feeling of having survived. One of the difficulties for today's young people is that they don't have this feeling. But those who survived World War II, Auschwitz, and political murder have a certain optimism combined with a bad conscience as well...because surviving such things is not only luck and grace—it is even perhaps evidence of a brutal vitality. I don't know, I've just become very skeptical.

—A. Leslie Willson

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C.K. Williams

One of the Muses

"Nor will his vision of the beautiful take the form of a face, or of hands, or of anything that is of the flesh. It will be neither words, nor knowledge, nor a something that exists in something else, such as a living creature, or the earth, or the heavens, or anything that is..."

Plato, *Symposium*

"Where our language suggests a body and there is none: there we should like to say, is a spirit."

Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*

1.

I will not grace you with a name...Even "you", however
modest the convention: not here.
No need here for that much presence. Let "you" be "she",
and let the choice, incidentally,
be dictated not by bitterness or fear—a discretion, simply,
the most inoffensive decorum.

This was, after all, if it needs another reason, long ago, and
not just in monthly, yearly time,
not only in that house of memory events, the shadowed,
off-sized rooms of which
it amuses us to flip the doors of like a deck of cards, but
also in the much more malleable,

mazy, convoluted matter of the psyche itself, especially the
wounded psyche,
especially the psyche stricken once with furrows of potential
which are afterwards untenanted:
voids, underminings, to be buttressed with the webbiest
filaments of day-to-dayness.

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2.

Long ago, in another place, it seems sometimes in another realm of being altogether,
one of those dimensions we're told intersects our own, rests there side by side with ours,
liable to be punched across into by charity or prayer, other skullings at the muscle.

How much of her essential being can or should be carried over into now isn't clear to me.
That past which holds her, yellowed with allusiveness, is also charged with unreality:
a tiny theater in the dim light of which one senses fearfully the contaminating powers of illusion.

Here, in a relatively stable present, no cries across the gorge, no veils atremble,
it sometimes seems as though she may have been a fiction utterly, a symbol or a system of them.
In any case, what good conceivably could come at this late date of recapitulating my afflictions?

3.

Apparently, it would have to do with what that ancient desperation means to me today.
We recollect, call back, not to suffer surely; is there something then for me, today,
something lurking, potent with another loss, this might be meant to alter or avert?

No, emphatically: let it be that simple. And not any sort of longing backwards, either:
no desire to redeem defeats, no humiliations to atone for, no expiations nor maledictions.
Why bother then? Why inflict it on myself again, that awful time, those frustrations and vacillations?

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It's to be accounted for, that's all. Something happened, the time has come to find its place.
Let it just be that: not to come to terms with, not salvage something from, not save.
There was this, it's to be accounted for: "she", for that, will certainly suffice.

4.

She had come to me...*She* to *me*...I know that, I knew it then, however much, at the end,
trying so to hang onto it, to keep something of what by then was nothing, I came to doubt,
to call the memory into question, that futile irreducible of what had happened and stopped happening.

She, to me, and with intensity, directness, aggression even, an aggression that may have been,
I think, the greater part of my involvement to begin with: in the sweep of her insistence,
it was as though she'd simply shouldered by some debilitating shyness on my part,

some misgiving or lack of faith I'd never dared acknowledge in myself but which, now,
I suddenly understood had been a part of my most basic being: a tearing shoal of self,
which, brought to light now, harrowingly recognized, had flowed away beneath me.

5.

Later, when everything had turned, fallen, but when we still found ways, despite it all,
through our impediments—my grief, her ever stricter panels of reserve—that first consummation,
her power, the surprising counter-power I answered with, came to seem a myth, a primal ceremony.

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Later, and not much later because the start and end were,
although I couldn't bear to think it,
nearly one, it became almost a ritual, not even ritual, a
repetition, and I had to recognize,
at last, how few times that first real, unqualified soaring
had actually been enacted.

Maybe several times, maybe only once: once and once—
that would have been enough,
enough to keep me there, to keep me trying to recuperate
it, so long after I'd begun to feel,
and to acknowledge to myself, those first searing hesita-
tions, falterings, awkwardnesses.

6.

Her withholdings were so indefinite at first, it wasn't hard
to fend them off, deny them.
The gasp that seemed—but did it really?—to extend a beat
into a sigh, and then the sigh,
did it go on an extra instant to become a heave of tedium,
impatience, resignation?

But then the silences: I could have, if I'd wanted to, dared
to, been certain of the silences.
They were in time, had duration, could be measured: how I
must have wanted not to know.
I didn't even name them that at first, "silence", no: lapses,
inattentions, respites.

It feels as though I'd begun to try to cope with them before
I'd actually remarked them.
They weren't silences until they'd flared and fused, until her
silences became her silence,
until we seemed, to my chagrin, my anguish, horror, to be
wholly in and of them.

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7.

Her silence: how begin to speak of it? I think sometimes I must have simply gaped.
There were harmonies in it, colors, progressions, resolutions: it was a symphony, a tone poem.
I seemed to live in it, it was always with me, a matrix, background sound: surf, wind.

Sometimes, when I'd try to speak myself, I'd find it had insinuated into my voice:
it would haul at me, I'd go hoarse, metallic, hollow, nothing that I said entailed.
More and more her presence seemed preceded by it: a quiet on the stair, hushed hall.

I'd know before I heard her step that she was with me, and when she'd go, that other,
simpler silence, after all the rest, was like a coda, magnificent, absorbing,
one last note reverberating on and on, subdividing through its physics toward eternity.

8.

At the same time, though, it was never, never quite, defined as being final.
She always, I have no idea how, left her clef of reticence ajar: a lace, a latticework.
I thought—I think that I was meant to think—it was provisional, a stage, a stopping place.

And, to exacerbate things, it became her: with it, and within it, she seemed to promise more.
The sheer *focus* it demanded; such shadings were implied in how she turned in it;
the subtleties I hadn't been allowed, the complexities not fathomed: she was being re-enhanced by it.

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What was inaccessible in her, what not, what—even as I'd hold her, even as we'd touch—
was being drawn away, marked off, forbidden: such resonance between potential and achieved.
The vibrations, though, as subtle as they were, crystalline, were tearing me apart.

9.

Sometimes, it would seem as though, still with me, she had already left me.
Sometimes, later, when she really had left, left again, I would seem to ache,
not with the shocks or after-shocks of passion, but with simply holding her, holding on.

Sometimes, so flayed, I would think that I was ready to accept defeat, ready to concede.
I may have even wished for hints of concrete evidence from her that she wanted us to stop it.
She could, I thought, with the gentlest move, have disengaged: I was ready for it...

No, not so, I wasn't. Wasn't what was wrong so slight, so patently inconsequential to the rest?
If I let her go like that, I thought, how would I ever know that what had brought us down
wasn't merely my own dereliction or impatience? No, there had to be a way to solve this.

10.

I kept thinking: there is something which, if said in precisely the right words to her...
I kept thinking, there's an explanation I can offer, an analysis, maybe just a way of saying,
a rhythm or a rhetoric, which will fuse the strands of her ambivalence and draw her back.

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I kept thinking—she may have kept me thinking—there's
something I haven't understood about her,
something I've misconceived or misconstrued, something
I've missed the message of and offended...
I'd set theories up from that, programs, and, with notes
along the way toward future tries,

I'd elaborate the phrases, paragraphs, the volumes of my
explication: I'd rehearse them,
offer them, and have her, out of hand, hardly noticing,
reject, discard, disregard them,
until I learned myself—it didn't take me long—out of
hand, hardly noticing, to discard them.

11.

Sometimes, though, I'd imagine that something—yes—I'd
said would reach her.
Her presence, suddenly, would seem to soften, there would
be a flood of ease, a decontraction.
She'd be with me, silent still, but *there*, and I would realize
how far she'd drifted.

I wouldn't know then, having her, or thinking that I did,
whether to be miserable or pleased.
I'd go on, even so, to try to seal it, build on it, extend,
certify it somehow,
and then, suddenly again, I'd sense that she'd be gone
again, or, possibly, much worse,

had never been there, or not the way I'd thought it for that
thankful instant.
I'd misinterpreted, misread, I'd have to start my search
again, my trial, travail.
Where did I ever find the energy for it? Just to think about
it now exhausts me.

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12.

Wherever I did find the strength, half of it I dedicated to absolving and forgiving her.
Somehow I came to think, and never stopped believing, I was inflicting all my anguish on myself.
She was blameless, wasn't she? Her passivity precluded else: the issue had to be with me.

I tried to reconceive myself, to situate myself in the syntax of our crippled sentence.
I parsed myself, searching out a different flow for the tangle of amputated phrases I was by then.
Nothing, though, would sound, would scan, no matter how I dissected and reassembled.

I couldn't find the form, the meter, rhythm, or, by now, the barest context for myself.
I became a modifier: my only function was to alter the conditions of this fevered predication.
I became a word one thinks about too closely: clumps of curves and serifs, the arbitrary symbol of itself.

13.

I became, I became...Finally, I think I must have simply ceased even that, becoming.
I was an image now, petrified, unmediated, with no particular association, no connotation,
certainly no meaning, certainly no hope of ever being anything that bore a meaning.

It was as though my identity had been subsumed in some enormous generalization,
one so far beyond my comprehension that all I could know was that I was incidental to it,
that with me or without me it would grind along the complex epicycles of its orbit.

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It was as though the system I'd been living in had somehow suddenly evolved beyond me.
I had gills to breathe a stratosphere, and my hopeless project was to generate new organs,
new lobes to try to comprehend this emotional ecology, and my extinction in it.

14.

The hours, the labor: how I wracked my mind, how my mind revenged itself on me.
I was wild, helpless, incapable of anything at all by now except watching as I tore myself.
I huddled there at the center of myself and tried to know by some reflexive act of faith

that I'd survive all this, this thing, my self, that mauled and savaged me.
I'd behold it all, so much frenzy, so many groans and bellows; even now, watching now,
I seem to sink more deeply into some protective foliage: I tremble in here, quake,

and then I dart—even now, still, my eyes, despite me, dart: walls, floor, sky—
I dart across that field of fear, away, away from there, from here, from anywhere.
I was frightened sometimes that I might go mad. And then I did just that—go mad.

15.

It was like another mind, my madness, my blesséd, holy madness: no, it *was* another mind.
It arrives, my other mind, on another night when I'm without her, hoping, or past hope.
My new mind comes upon me with a hush, a fluttering, a silvery ado, and it has a volume,

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granular and sensitive, which exactly fits the volume of the mind I already have.
Its desire seems to be to displace that other mind, and something in me—how say what?
how explain the alacrity of such a radical concurrence?—decides to let it,

and the split-second of the decision and the onset of the workings of that mind are instantaneous.
In one single throb of intuition I understood what the function of my new mind was,
because, in and of it now, convinced, absorbed, I was already working out its implications.

16.

I knew already that my other mind—I hardly could recall it—had had a flaw and from that flaw
had been elaborated a delusion, and that delusion in its turn was at the base of all my suffering,
all the agonies I'd been inflicting, so unnecessarily, I understood, upon myself.

I had thought, I realized, that reality and experience, data and events, were to be received,
that perception, sensory, experiential accumulation, was essentially passive,
that it accepted what was offered and moved within that given, the palpable or purely mental,

partaking of it as it could, jiggling the impressions here or there a bit,
a sentence added, or a chapter, but nothing more than that: we were almost victims,
or if not quite victims, not effective agents surely, not of anything that mattered much.

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17.

What my new mind made me understand, though it had
been there all the while before me,
was that reality, as I'd known it, as I knew it now, was
being generated, every second,
out of me and by me: it was me, myself, and no one else,
who spun it out this way.

It was my own will, unconscious until now but now with
purpose and intent, which made the world.
Not made-up, which implies imagination or idea, but made,
actually created, everything,
in a succession of instants I could follow the flow of now
with my very blood.

Even time: I looked back at the wash of my time on earth
and it, too, was a function of this moment.
Then cosmic time was flowing, too, from this truth I was
living now, not for myself now,
for my salvation or survival, but for the infinitely vulnerable
fact of existence itself.

18.

Does it matter very much what the rest was, the odd conclu-
sions I kept coming to?
What really seems important was that, even as it happened,
even as I let it happen,
even as I held it all in a sort of mental gale—it wasn't
necessary then to work it out like this,

all of it was there at once, in a single block, entire, a kind of
geometric bliss—
I understood that it was all hallucination and delusion, that
these insights or illuminations
were wretched figments of emotion all, but I didn't care, I
let them take me further,

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past logic, proposition, syllogism: I was a premise
mechanism now, an epistemology machine;
I let my field of vision widen—everything was mine now,
coal and comet, root and moon,
all found their footing, fulfilled at last, in my felicity, and
then, rendingly, it ended.

19.

Why it stopped was as much a mystery to me as why it
should have happened in the first place,
but when it did, something else took its place, a sort of
vision, or a partial vision,
or at least a knowledge, as instantly accessible and urgent as
the other, and, I'd find, as fleeting.

Somehow, I knew, I had just touched into the very ground
of self, its axioms and assumptions,
and what was there wasn't what I'd thought—I hadn't
known what I'd thought but knew it now—
not violence, not conflagration, sexual turbulence, a
philosophic or emotive storm,

but a sort of spiritual erasure, a nothingness of motive and
intention, and I understood, too,
in another bolt, that all that keeps us from that void,
paradoxically perhaps, is trust...
Trust in what? Too late: that perception, too, was gone; I
had to watch another revelation end.

20.

But not badly, even so...I came back, to myself, feeling not
contrite, not embarrassed,
certainly not frightened...awkward, maybe, toward myself,
shy, abashed: I couldn't, as it were,
meet the gaze of this stranger I was in a body with, but I
couldn't, either, take my eyes away.

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Something had altered, *I* had: there was something unfamiliar, incongruous about me.
I couldn't specify exactly, not at first, what I felt, it wasn't, though, unpleasant.
I probed myself as though I'd had an accident; nothing broken, I was all right, more:

a sense of lightness, somehow, a change in my specific gravity, a relief, unburdening,
and then I knew, without any fuss or flourish, what it was: she, she wasn't with me now,
she was gone from me, from either of my minds, all my minds, my selves—she simply wasn't there.

21.

I could say it feels as though I'm taking breaths: she is gone and gone, he, shriven of her,
leaps into his life, but, as I went about the work of understanding what had happened to me,
who I was now, it was clear at once that my having torn myself from her was unimportant.

She was gone, why she'd been there to begin with, what I'd seen in her, thought she'd meant,
why I'd let that suffering come to me, became immediately the most theoretical of questions.
That I'd have to be without her now meant only that: without her, not forlorn, bereft.

I even tested cases: if she went on to someone else, touched someone else, would I envy them,
her touch, her fire? Not even that: her essence for me was her being with me for that time,
with someone else, she, too, was other than herself: a wraith, a formula or intellection.

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22.

I felt no regret—indifference, rather, a flare of disbelief,
even an unexpected moment of concern.
Had she suffered, too? Had she even sensed, in her empyrean
distance, that this,
any of it, was going on at all? If I really had to answer that,
I'd have to doubt it.

I think that after those first moments, she was gone already
from me: perhaps, though,
it's not my task to try to answer that, perhaps all I really
have the right to ask is
what the person I am now might have to do with her,
wraith or not, memory of a memory or not?

Was I enhanced by her? Diminished by her? All that's really
sure is that if I was changed,
it wasn't the embrace, the touch, that could have done it,
but what came after, her withdrawal,
her painful non-responses, her absence and the ever more
incorporeal innuendos in that absence.

23.

And my "madness", that business of the other mind, that
"trust": have I taken anything from that?
Perhaps. I think I'd always realized the possibility was there
for us to do that to ourselves,
undo ourselves that way, not in suicide, but in something
much more dire, complete, denying.

I think that I'd suspected, too, that with the means to do it,
I would someday have to do it.
And now, what I'd been afraid I'd do, I'd done: that she'd
had to drive me to it didn't matter,
although probably without her, without what she'd
inflicted on me, I'd have never come to it.

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Perhaps, with her abrasive offerings and takings-back, I'd
been ground down like a lens:
I'd had, to my horror, really to look within myself, into the
greater sea of chaos there,
and I'd survived it, shaken but intact, with auras, even, of a
kind of gratitude.

24.

What I'm left with after all this time is still the certainty
that something was attained,
though all that remains now are flickers, more and more
occasional, more disjointed—
pale remnants of the harsh collaborations those intermediary
silences symbolized so well.

And this...I mean *this*, these lines, constructions, etudes:
these small histories,
where did this come from? As I said, there was no desire to
go over all of it again,
but, after all, whatever ambivalence I felt about it, it
demanded care, even labor.

The need for doing it never quite defined itself: it, like her,
came uncalled for.
A tone took me, an impulse toward a structure: I found it
interesting, a question of aesthetics.
If that were so, might there be another way, another mode
in which to come to it?

25.

The proposition now could be that this *is* she, this, itself,
wholly "she".
Not an artifact, not a net in which some winged thing pro-
tests or pines, but her,
completely fused now, inspiration, outcome: she would be,
now, what she herself effected,

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the tones themselves, the systems she wrought from the conflicting musics of my conscience.
This time it would be that all she meant to me were these attempts, these uncertain colorations,
that took so long to get here, from so far, and from which she would be departing now at last,

not into another hesitation, pause, another looking back reluctantly on either of our parts—
no turnings, no farewells—but a final sundering, a seeing-off, a last, definitely indicated,
precisely scored—no rests, diminuendos, decrescendos—silencing, and silence.

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The Destroyer of Delight

Paul West

Hard to tell, sometimes, as I fix my mind's eye on the unkempt fleece of his beard amid which his mouth moves like something undercover, if what I remember or even register is what I said or what I thought, or what he said or what I hope he said. Oddest of all is the sense I have that he is one of the most important people I'm going to know. He feels momentous without being even different. He hasn't come into his own yet, which is weird inasmuch as his life is nearly over. Yet I stay on, seeing in fact little of him, although pondering and embellishing his image during the nights. Minor things—at least things that seem minor now—stick in my head for reasons unknown: his grandfather's hands smelled of meatfat (his grandfather owned a small butcher shop), and he has vivid memories of how his mother dealt with boils, applying a scalding bread poultice to his rear or some other part, mostly his rear.

"Well I'll be a Dutchman," he exclaims when I have said something stupid, and I point out that, if what he says about

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his name is true, he's a Dutchman already, but he ignores that and regales me with his thing about how Dutchmen founded this country: "Van Nostrand, van Cortland," he says, "Peter Stuyvesant, De Witt and Spuyten Duyvil. Flying Dutchmen," he tells me, "Dutchmen in flight, in baggy pants, getting away from all those canals." Goeloeps was one of thousands.

I blink. One of his ancestors made a living by removing dead cows and rendering them down, and his grandfather was a butcher, so I wonder if all his ancestors made a living from dead meat and so, cumulatively over the length of history, have driven him to the cool sheen of ball bearings, which have no fat on them, no hide. Yet as often as I ask him these things, like an interviewer warming up, he dismisses the whole conversation with a flouncing shake of his beard and heads for the back room merely to put his face in order again.

One night, after a series of bad losses on the machines, mostly because I'm shaking them too roughly even for liberal tilt, I head for the same place, to recover my own composure, and I end up sitting on the floor on the coarse mat put in there because nobody wipes feet in this day and age, and I begin reading the old catalogues again, treating myself to *Army-Navy: The Game for the Whole World*, *Grand Slam*, and *West Wind: 1935*, *1953*, and *1941*, the last of which shows four or five crewmen in whites working the guide ropes of a canting schooner amid a sharp corrugation of whitecaps, and I think how wholesome, how standard the clouds look, all the same shape, with not a U-boat in sight. Now where was he just then? The backglass is a maze of numbered columns, but its upper half frames the schooner view inside a cross section of a boat's hull, so as you stare at the heeling schooner you also see it cut in half and framed in red. It says Exhibit Supply Co., and there are multi-colored flags behind the numbers on the disks, but I have just felt a page detach itself and lift away as I slip fingers behind the page I'm looking at. A tucked-in afterthought? A new machine hot from the factory? A flier? Nothing of the kind, but a handwritten sheet of instructions folded once and beginning to fade from

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white to buff. The hand is cursive and small, rather hasty but here and there inked over twice.

"On Funnel Road," I read, "between Drop Ridge and Slung Ferry, east shore of Lake Genco." Then it stops, neither sentence nor explanation. "From the Steel Pier (either on Donks Road or North Sledgehammer) to South Moneta, from Whelk Harbor Inn, take 113 (road closest to the lake, *not 35*), to the village of Needle Ridge (about 18 miles from Elderberry). You will see a green sign that says Needle Ridge and then a Milliken Power Station sign to the left. Ignore that. Don't take the road left to Milliken but a few feet later take a slight left, about 1½ degrees, on Plummet Drop Road (here you leave 113 which curves slightly to Slung Ferry). Stay two miles on Needle Ridge Road, then make a left at Fennel Road (at the corner where there's a farm with three big silos, one red, the others white); there is a Dead End sign and a sign that says Eat, Get Gas, near Al's Marine. Al's Marine is closed. Follow Fennel Road west down to the lake if you can, zigzagging a little, then in the woods at the bottom of the hill, some three miles along, the road divides."

Now I am truly lost.

"There is a Y sign. Take the right fork and watch out. It is a yellow cottage, the eighth from the one on the left. There is a mailbox with no name on it. If lost, phone anyone in the area or ask how to get back to Al's Marine via Fubbel Road, and Al will tell you how to get back to civilization."

Thousands must have disappeared trying it. If these are not the directions to where Gloops lives, then they are a prank, and a prankster he is not. Suddenly I envision a previous guardian of the machines, whom he taunted in this way, cramming the dry mouth of guesswork with wrong turns. No doubt my predecessor, if he fell for it, must have died out there among the raccoons and the jays, sick at last of eating berries and swallowing his tongue. I decide to check the scrawl against a gas station map, but I know of no Lake Genco, I know of no lake even, but my eye catches the same word, Genco Inc., under a picture of the backglass for *Hi-Score*, a machine from 1957, so he must have doodled these

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directions out of gently malicious fun, fudging a landscape from old pinball names (mainly manufacturers) in the remote hope that his deputies, machine-minders, whatever we are, would make the attempt and get lost in the New Jersey countryside. Is that how my predecessor got himself fired?

"Who was before *me*?" The question dies in his beard.

"Why, just about everybody. You sick today?"

"No, in this job, I mean."

"They never has names. I gives 'em names, but those is their Gloops-names, not their real ones."

"Was there ever," (I have rehearsed this) "an Al? A Funnel? A Milliken?"

"Oh, you found it," he says without amusement. "They always does. It has nothing to do with me—it kind of found its way there and it'll kind of find its way out again."

"I'm getting to know you," I tell him, "I'll have to watch my step. There is no highway 113 or even 35."

"Ah, Dew, my boy," he exclaims in a burst of expansive geniality, "it's a prophetic map. Maps about what's already there is tedious, as the ant said when he climbed into the wall socket, right where the electricity was curving around and going back 'cause it couldn't flow. Did I ever tell you about Rommel's asparagus? Anti-glider posts they stuck in fields, so's gliders crashed when they went in. Which is why you had your Ludington-Griswold nose modification on the Waco 4-As, a kind of heavy-metal starfish riveted onto the front. Six braces, twelve o'clock, three, five, six, seven, and nine. Otherwise the nose just crumpled up and the crew with it. I was one of the lucky ones. In the old days, you'd come sailing in and see the asparagus only at the last moment, hoping you'd be able to land between them, but most of us didn't, so you landed expecting to crash anyway and, after they beefed up the Waco's nose, some of us got away with it. I sometimes think I died in a crash in one of those fields in Holland. It *was* Holland you see. Ironic when you consider. And, ever after, when I landed, it was my ghost flying the glider in, with nothing to fear at all, naught to fear. Had a pretty good record I did, my own kind of Flying Dutchman.

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Those Wacos could carry more than their own weight, but they was only made of wood, the surface was thin plywood covered with cloth. The body part was steel tubes, but they was mostly plywood. You know tea chests? Well it was like coming back to earth in a tea chest. If I recall a'right, we called it the Waco 4A, but the other armies—the Brits and the rest—they called it Hadrian."

"As in Hengest, Horsa," I say lamely.

"And Hannibal. No noise, just a swooshing in the wires and aginst the cockpit front. What I liked was the way you used 'em and left 'em there, unless there was a pick-up, which was rare, and you'd rig up a line between two posts and a DC-3 would zoom in and hook you up into the sky again. It was a good time, kind of definite. You had one chance in ten of not crashing. You had just about none of getting back. I got back twice, but then I crashed, I crashed into a glider that had crashed, so at least you could say Rommel didn't get me. Funny thing, the gauges in them gliders was the same as in powered planes, except the vibration in the planes kept the gauges from sticking, but not in the gliders. You had to keep tapping them to make sure they was telling the truth."

Oh how I would like to tap *him*, just to make sure.

"Family album," I say to him as yet another overlap (this the dawn one) uncoils. "Don't you save things?"

"Those who does," he at once pronounces in his hoarsest hoot (his throat hasn't woken up yet in spite of the milky coffee back in his living room), "loses them just like that. Those who doesn't lives longer. What you has to learn is that you leaves it to things to *look after you*, not the other way round. They has nothing else to do."

Again I'm tempted to find him intelligible. Having lived, he knows; the evidence is as much in his mind as his junk is in his pouch. Yet I demur, short of sleep, my wrists quivering from leaning on the machines all night; I have calluses on both thumbs and on my flipper fingers. "Nobody's that passive, I say, you don't just let things happen *to* you."

"Oh," he toots, "then you stops them from happening?

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You does not."

"You stop the kids from shoving the machines about."

"Big things," he says, "refuse to die. You try it, then come back in fifty years and tell me how you's doing."

"Or growing up, you mean? Things like that."

"Old, young, bad, good, we's all flowers in the vale of day."

That stops me dead. I tell him so. Explain, I plead: "Don't get fancy when I'm serious."

But he heads away from me, barging into a kid on purpose, hitching up his dungarees, and jerking pins and needles from his arm.

"You've had quite a life," I tell him bleakly. "This must be quite an anticlimax. Pinball after all that."

It's as if we've come out on a plateau together, with so much information given after the bogus map.

"Your privates doesn't get quite as numb," he says. "Otherwise not a hell of a lot of difference." Once again he has strayed into the field of vision, and I, thinking I see him clearly, find him blocking my view of him, a man who is both himself and his alias, his being and its shield, a more and more vivid nonentity the longer I know him, almost as if I had begun inventing him. He looks at me, telling me this or that, how it felt to be flying a glider with a jeep lashed to the floor right behind your shoulders and you had to get out of the way fast on landing, or from another world, the sarong magic of Gottlieb's *Paradise* with its Eyecatching Animated Hula-Dancer in Light Box! Ah, the nail-biting haste of the one, the swooning rapture of the other. And yet he looks at me, smirking in his beard with his eyes blank, as if he thinks I think *I've* invented all this, fitting him out with a life, any old life, rather than work for a surly enigma whose name I know but whose address and private life cannot be found.

I ask about him, but no one knows, although several guess: a boarding house on a street parallel to the pier, a Rolls Royce picks him up at Goldbarth's delicatessen, he takes such and such a bus to Raritan, Tenafly, or Newark. No, he vanishes into thin air. Four times I have tried to track him, but the

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dark envelops him, although once, as he dematerialized, I thought I heard the whirr of bicycle wheels, once the slap of a worn-out car door, once the scuff-slither of a sneaker running, and once (I cannot explain it) the plash of oars, as if he'd gone away by boat or gondola. When I arrive, thanks to lions and chimpanzees, I'm bleary, I'm not awake, nor am I at my fastest, and it is always dark, and he refuses to go home while it is light. I have tried keeping an eye open for his arrival, but that is too complex an operation after a night in pinballtown; I suspect, I hope, that one of these days he intends to let me see it, his actual exit into the other world, and he will dawdle for me to catch up with him and not, as at present, cross an intervening space without seeming to pass through it.

"I never catch you going," I tell him, "you're some getaway artist."

"I stand," he says maliciously, "in harness on top of the building, and a DC-3 snatches me up. Whisks me away at sudden speed."

"So as not to miss your bus," I add, but he doesn't hear; the kids have arrived to be rebuked, and I notice he has an armful of properly printed placards saying Out of Order.

"To where?" It sounds rude and I regret it.

"Mind your own. Some of these here machines has to be serviced right away. What you been doin' to them in the night?"

"But you haven't even inspected them," I protest, "you haven't even looked. You have only just arrived."

"I can tell at a distance they has been hammered and shoved," he says, "and lifted up and *interfered* with."

From now on, one night in every four or five, I notice a machine is missing, and it never comes back. I ask.

"Takes time," he says, "especially with these newfangled fancy things. Take weeks to repair, takes months to resupply. Look at the damage they has sustained. Some of them we'll never see again, not now you and them kids has beaten the jesus out of them."

My nights are duller as a result, and I walk, breath held,

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past the spaces where the machines were, powerless to halt the evacuation. Once there were many more, now there are fifteen, enough to play of course, and the survivors the sturdiest maybe, but it is like the end of the world, it is like walking among the doomed, so I play with increasing vehemence; I come in by day and pay my quarters, just to get in enough play. I never know when tonight's play on a particular game will be my last.

"The *Paragon* has gone," I yell at him. "I don't mind that, it's an ungiving game at best with too many ways to drain, but now you've sent the *Flash* away, and that was an easy game full of sounds." He stares, little knowing I dote on the whiplash sounds of pain it made, the misericorde of its climbing pitch as you scored on and on all the way to 180,000 and past, which he then jacks up to 300,000 and even 450,000, and then the screams begin to come from inside yourself, not from the machine at all. You always lose, and yet the echoes of the great games linger, as if you were tormenting the machine beyond endurance, to a pitch at which its circuits whine with pain which, at the very end, it realizes it enjoys, and so lets out, diminuendo, a highwire, salivating sigh that says thank you, I have never been so deliciously hurt before. In how many other games does the ball whizz across the playing area at a diagonal, not going up and round, but like a swallow cleaving the space briefly out of focus because you fixed your eye on the far lane parallel to the backglass?

"I've got it," I tell him sullenly, "you're going to bring back the old machines. A *Paradise* for a *Flash*. The kids won't stand for it, they won't play those old tinkly things."

"Kids," he lectures me, "will play any goddamn' thing there is to play, so long as they's wastin' their time, they doesn't give a whelk's earlobe how."

It all sounds so cheerful. These are *games*, after all. Fun, chance, lose a quarter at most; but something dreary and funereal underlies it: not merely the empty space of a machine that has gone to hospital, and not merely the reversal of time when a *Paradise* replaces a *Flash* (if that ever hap-

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pens, is to happen), but as if Gloops were the destroyer of delight who, turn and turn alike, found his only delight in doing us down, switching off the machines, cutting the power, giving wrong change, never refunding quarters for extra games piled up by closing time, and, worse, despising inventive or rapturous play, and in the end not replacing the machines but leaving the space bare, having it French polished like the roof of a coffin, and, worst, actually forgetting not only his old delight in playing second-generation machines, but also not even heeding his own joy in cutting us off: the kids, Penninck (author under a pseudonym of science-fiction books), and me. (Do only Dutchmen play in here?)

"You've become mechanical," I say to Gloops. "You don't even enjoy the awful thing you're doing."

"Oh, there'll be replacements."

"This isn't World War Two. You're going downhill."

"Maybe you're right," he says astonishingly. "I guess I don't want to live to see the next generation of machines—five levels, ten balls, twenty feet wide, four players all playing at once, ten different sound tracks, red-hot balls and melting glass, spouts of blue water and flippers that give you an electric shock when you shoot bad or tilt. It's on the way. It's in the trades, not the winds, the journals. Next century, the player will be inside the machine, and if you tilt you'll lose an arm, a leg."

"That's," I rebuke him, "what they lose in here any day of the week anyway. What's the difference? Bring them back. You've got it wrong, anyway. The next generation of machines won't be pinball, they'll be video games called *Convoy*, *Space Warp*, *Battle of the Asteroids*, and things like that. They stand higher and are really TV screens. Come that day, I won't ever go into a pinball parlor again—I just can't translate what I like in these machines to that sort of set-up."

He looks appalled. He hasn't thought of this. It's as if he thought the future was going to be one big electronic hype, a playfield of deafening finesse, and it turns out to be only motor torpedo boats in space, a chunk of the old military bullfight, which he knows so well. Skills, yes, but violent,

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although no more violent than some of the best new wide games of the present. Well, bloodshed and destruction, then, that's what gets him; but deep down he longs for the days when pinball was more passive, and (a few nudgings and shakes apart) you accepted what the machine handed out: before flippers, not long after the holy olden days when a game called *Little Manhattan* was the rage, and you shot balls with a plunger into a bagatelle-type playfield with studs equally spaced. That was 1901, according to the catalogues, and then came *Dutch's Pool* in the twenties and Gottlieb's *Baffle Ball* in 1931. I say their names to him and he flinches; a race memory makes his lip quiver in the nest of his beard, his eyes focus on something far distant and flying upward very fast.

"You needn't," he says, "go that far back. There's recent."

"The Great Age," I whisper. "*Gold Star*, Genco's *Junior*, *Signal*, *Flicker*, *Fleet*, *Flash*, *Whiffle*, *Rink*, *Jitterbug*, *Mr. Chips*, *Hi-Lo*, *Colors*, *9 sisters*, *Dragonette*, *Sunny*, *Shantytown*, *Humpty*—"

"You sure ain't been *sleeping* in the back room. Thought you'd kind of pick it up if you stayed long enough. It's all as old as Napoleon now. You sometimes finds them, one or two, in reasonable functioning state, in run-down dinettes where folks live that hasn't much hope. They just plinks away, the machines that is, and they's slow, awkward, you could read a book while playin', but you could always get a low-grade game out of most of 'em, providing your wishes wasn't excessive. Nowadays there's more in the museums than in the dinettes, though. They's antiques. Priceless, I suppose, whereas in them flashy parlors they always has a couple of beat-up machines for sale, to make room for..." He trails off, unable to voice abominations to come.

"*Fibron* and *Ionisation*," I whisper resentfully, in this moment at one with him, who right on top of my litany of sacred names has heard the enemy, and they are not his.

"Names like that," he murmurs with a stifled curse. "They has no charm, they isn't part of the bright side of your life, oh no, they has mostly nothing to do with this earth at all."

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"It's where we come to die," I say, feeling fatal.

"It's where we do."

"But there's a bright side." I am groping to find it.

"I have," he sighs, "a touch of death in me right now. You get used to that." His face is the tint of an old wasp nest.

"Me too. I sometimes feel as if I'm, well, floating away from myself. Everything comes loose."

"Looser than that. The elbow from its cup."

Now I remember another tirade, or rather the broken rant it came out as. A month ago, easily, but it came back verbatim, maybe because he'd seemed unable to put more than two or three words together at one time, in one breath. Using homemade stones to step on, he dawdled forward, girding an anger so intense it should have whooshed him out of sight, but I felt only his mind's rush as the spent-sounding words came out, forensic and distant, but awkward and sweet too, voiced by some other batshit entity who knew him far too well and scrunched up Gloops' doldrums into dribs and drabs, ever so tenderly, mind you, yet with a mouth of alum.

As speech it was the equivalent of a slowed-down movie. Not only could the listener linger. The listener could fill in the gaps, live a lifetime between the end of one phrase and the new one starting, or even between end of word and start of next.

"Black of light," he began, then paused inhaling hard. "I once tried my luck on them VD—video machines, but you have no chance at all. VD games is for losers only. Gotta get the getters afore they gets to you. Squadron of frisky little hunchbacks, Dew, let loose from some pattern in a Persian carpet. Like soldiers on parade. Squish-fizz, they has you before your Jack Robinson is said. Too fast. It's like a fruitfly chasing a cheetah. Dozens aswarm in the maze, wherever you look. Each and every one is going sideways fast as up and down. All got mouths on them. Snap. Gobble. You melt in a puddle of pissed light. No quarter. Right when you steer to get him, he gets you. Gets your little man, first one, then two. Only one man left by that time, and him nothing but a

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death wish. Or it is shoals of dart-like icicles, all of somebody's air force lined up to beat you to a pulp with formation changes, color changes too, faster than bite a lip. A million Arnhems in one drop. Oh, the carnage in the window, nearly as fast as piranha fish. Eyes ache, head a-ring. Find new windows to be unhappy at. Else you play with chubby little wasps. Or beetles. Sort of eyes you'd *expect* in fazer runts. Your fleet is scrap the minute you begin. No chance to defend. Tried again with dippy little needle planes. Saw stars. Banged cabinet with fist. Rutcheting it like mad. Your men is gone before the hostiles fire. Programmed, as they say, to vanish a second before the deathray hits. So you is always playing with condemned men anyway. Just as well you never gets to know their faces, the poor froops. Let that be a word for a day. Froops needs a word for them. A fast shuffle of unfriendly light full of cozy names suctions you out. I must've held the steering bulb all wrong. The warp in the button was nothing like the warp in me."

Imagine the white spaces amid all this, or the white air of his non-utterances. Who would ever think he'd talk so slow? I wondered when he'd tire of slowcoach and gabble as if overwound. All he did, though, was to get slower still, more miserably ponderous, wet under the eyes, whose corners had filled with conjunctivitis white as Pagliacci makeup. You could tell the videos had shafted him, those VDs of his private hell.

How I fumbled in his corner. On, I told myself. On? Close to *him*, prepositions hardly meant a thing. Tenderness was best. The only thing. One day soon he would be sitting in a room somewhere, not even able to rub his kneecaps together, and not have the moxy to cross the floor and tug down the blind so's the world wouldn't see how much too tired he was to cross the floor. On with it, I said. See how he flounders in the copperplate of your silence. He sees you looking into him as if he were a screen.

What I then said, since it proved a boon, I say again now, in the selfsame words, and cup his elbow one more time.

"Do you know those science-fiction movies," I say, "in

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which some astronaut—Soviets call them cosmonauts—comes undone from the outside of the spacecraft. The line breaks or he inadvertently unhooks himself. And away he goes, into the galaxy, floating sort of frozen at attention, absolutely alone among the stars with a given quantity of air. They have such dignity sailing away like that in their mummy suits. They can count the seconds as they pass. In almost all the movies I've seen, no one gets them back. It does happen, but mostly they go floating off into the dense blackness, slow as you like, but get farther away all the time." I feel as if I have been speaking for hours.

"Float out," he says abruptly. "Not bad. It could be worse. Going out healthy's good."

"Better than being born sick."

"Oh, infinitely."

"You're mighty early," I tell him.

"A mite early. I had to see."

"There's nothing to see. We did rather well late last night. I let some people play right at the last minute—you'd think they'd timed it that way."

His eyes seem to scale over, his hands fumble slowly in the pouch of his dungarees. A bit of his old tone returns. "Some, you see, can concentrate only when the clock's against them. They need that stimulus. If they has hours in front of them, they play badly. If they've only seconds, they play a blinder."

I know that feeling, and I remember the Indian singer, Kesar Bar Kerkar, whose name a friend made me learn by heart because it was silly to refer to her without being able to say who she was. "You wouldn't know the words," I tell Gloops. "It was the emotion, all emotion, and emotions of all kinds. I heard a tape in some record store, and then, a year later, when I was up in the daylight and alive, somebody said one of her songs was aboard the *Voyager* spacecraft, going out into the Milky Way and beyond. In a goldplated record on its side. Imagine that! She's dead, I think, but her voice is touring the galaxy. At least, the chance of being heard. All they have to do is wind up their gramophones, and there

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she'll be. And all the rest of the stuff. Another kind of Ark. An Ark in an album."

"I wouldn't mind being with her," he says with disconsolate severity. "Things around here is just about finished. I've had my inning."

"It's not as bad as that. Still a few good machines."

"Not the machines. My mind."

"Your mind's as good as mine."

"Then that makes two of us."

"I'll work days as well," I say in a burst of tender zeal. "I don't sleep that much anyway."

"I'm just waiting," he says, his eyes on the far end of the parlor as if expecting the wall to move toward him. "I'll wait it out. Not long."

"It sounds bad," I say. "What's really behind it?"

"I've talked my head off," he answers, designing with his boot toe on the swabbed-down floor still smeared. "I'm what is known, in the trade, as an old fogey. *Vecchio pazzo.* Crazy as a loon. It sounds like a pizza. The time comes, Dew, when your head begins to do things of its own, which you can't control and don't really want to, as if an animal's come off its leash for the first time." Then he slips into his hoarse, hortatory tone, talking more thickly and seeming to address the middle distance. "Some folks blabs. Well, I has blabbed. I go off at the mouth, I goes off, I has gone off, at the mouth, like a firecracker. I mean no harm, of course not. But when you don't quite control your mouth, like some older folk don't control their bodily functions, then you become an em—" he pauses, riding a long hyphen—"barrassment."

"Happened to me long ago," I tell him, sensing how feeble the likeness is. "My mind runs off. I think askew, I have no mental identity, see."

"You," he says, no longer orating, "are a pilot fish. Not a barnacle, but somebody as leads, keeps the other guy on the move, I mean, you're useful." One eye, the semi-closed one, is higher than the other; but both seem to have risen, in a brow contraction of abstract disdain, while the nose and mouth have elongated downward, looking for a home in the

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beard. His face is racked, I am thinking. I say, "I'll help. We'll get you out of here, before it's too late."

"There's nowhere to go," he says miserably. "You're not supposed to run. You're supposed to wait your turn."

"I think I understand, I know who," I say impetuously.

"You've no idea."

"Then there are depths."

"Ocean deep," he says remotely.

"We have guys. The parlor regulars, anyway. *Me*. You have help."

"That," he grimaces, "is hardly your standard football squad. Thanks but no thanks. You've no idea."

"Then who else?" Not so much offended as wrongfooted, I want to impress him with an irresistible answer. "There are boxers around. Police."

He laughs the laugh of self-derision, then translates it into the laugh of extravagant sympathy. "That's it, Dew. That his hit. Everybody all round us, but it's like the water in the poem, nary a drop to drink. Whereof you speak, there's millions that have no idea." The archaic turn of phrase ages him, makes him almost a goner.

"I want to help, Gloops. I really do."

"A choice of flowers only, my lad."

"You're being lugubrious."

"What a word. I'm being me. I'm the one who does it best. Why don't you start them machines up?"

When I do, as if he's watched me during the night, he wanders round, lifting up the cardboard covers, then loads them all with quarters and sets them going, strolling back and forth like a man in a trance to pull and release the plungers, which he does with a pensive, lazy motion, not bothering to watch the results in the open machines or listen to the ones I've covered. The balls dribble about and vanish, but *The Black Knight* says his piece, *Eight Ball De Luxe* says "Chalk up" from under its comforter, and the usual call signs come from *Xenon* and *Flight 2000*.

"They make a poor showing now," he says without looking round at me. "I'm glad you covered them up."

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"Well, as they say, nothing lasts forever." I wish I hadn't said it, it sounded like a diagnosis of him.

"It ain't meant to," he says from the pit of his soul. "We got to get accustomed, each his own fashion, hey? Ain't it time you was home? You'll get no pay for day."

Amazingly he walks me outside into the spendthrift dazzle of ten-thirty A.M.

"The machines," I say.

"Maybe their day has come. They's chained, anyway."

"But the kids? What about the kids?"

"I seen Mungo and Tefnit in there too, they's half-responsible men. Mungo's a waiter and Tefnit's a retired cop. Between them they might stop them from bashing in the glass. You want to walk a while?"

Through the milling horde on the boardwalk we go, north toward Garden Pier, but we make a left on Maryland and head for the All Wars Memorial Building, which means more to him than to thousands of others, then make another left on Pacific, cross Virginia, and come back along Pennsylvania, past Ocean World, like a conquering army shrunk to two. He sneezes in the sunlight, his eyes tear, and he sees none of those peering at him in derisive amazement, certain they've spotted a mountain man wandering at risk.

"Bums," he says between sneezes: the new generation. "Like that music thing, an intermezzo. And then nothing else forever and ever. Sometimes I curses electricity, I blames *it*. He laughs bitterly. You ever seen a pinball machine as runs on steam? Those was days."

"Steam," I ask. *Steam?*

"Just my joke," he tells me brusquely. "What the hell is going on down on the pier?" We see cameras, a rapt circle of folk with nothing better to do, a horse with rider who seems to have an eyepatch, and he is riding without a saddle and seated too far back.

Is he going to jump, like in the old days? Gloops has kindled briefly, remembering female riders leaping their horses into the sea, when such doings were a main attraction. I ask and discover that it is some writer doing a publicity pic-

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ture for his book, and now they are going to film him on the beach.

"Can't ride no horse from that far back," Gloops calls to him, only to get a ceremonious wave from the rider, who looks bored, glad of an interruption.

"Mighty good pinball parlor in this area," Gloops is yelling back at him. "You oughta come play before they closes me up for good and makes a casino in the john."

The writer waves agreement, calls something about can he bring his horse? "No horseplay," he says.

"No shit," says Gloops to himself. "Let's check on Mungo and that cop. They could lift a machine between them. A cop could unlock the chain."

I go in with him, from the spilling sun, to check things out, only to find Tefnit agitated because the machine, the *Xenon* Gloops hates for its rocket whine and eunuch-robot voices whispering *Enter* and *Ba*, *Tha*, *Pelp!*, has swallowed his quarter and refuses to yield it up.

"You been shoving it again," Gloops says quietly. "You guys. You cops. Kids knows no better, but you comes in here with your hip pockets draggin' and you shakes the living love out of a ten thousand dollar machine and then you expects it to give you your lousy quarter back, like you pulled off its pecker and told it to shove itself. *Cops. Kids.*"

Tefnit's belly overhangs his belt, so he always stands a little back from the machine when playing, but now he backs away from Gloops, who looks fit to charge, then hands him a dime, a nickel, and five pennies.

"Twenty cents," says Tefnit, bloatedly timid.

"Five cents damages, a five-cent fine. This is my parlor. I make the rules. Kids gets a three-cent fine, grown-ups five. You play this machine, you play it good, which means gentle. Look at all them thumbprints on the glass. Lucky you isn't payin' twice the fine when Dew here cleaned up, spic and span, all night long."

Feeling I have been enlisted, I echo *All Night* and slip Tefnit a nickel, so he asks for a quarter now, and Gloops roars at him, gamekeeper and lion tamer and schoolmaster

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all in one: "Rolling in money! What you want to manhandle a machine for? Didn't you beat enough heads in when you was the man in blue? The hospitals is full of those you took a special interest in. I'm goin' to watch you play, *officer*, and you better go smooth."

There he stands, watching Tefnit lose and lose, ball after ball, Tefnit afraid to curse lest he crack the glass or translate his mouth into a vehement shove that makes the *Xenon* tilt.

Ba, *Tha*, I hear. *Touchdown terminal*, *exit Xenon. Try again*, *earthling*. Tefnit goes away, grumbling, working his shoulders as if to ready himself for a prizefight.

"I better not leave again," says Gloops. "Thank you for the sunlight, though. You needs it more than I, I seen mushrooms with better complexions than you. I think you better sleep."

"Balls to sleep," I tell him. I am too excited.

"Harsh," he rebukes me in a gentle tone, lingering on the *sh* sounds in his teeth. "Don't you be harsh about sleep."

OK, I tell myself while nodding at him. My blood sugar is low, my eyes are dim, the sounds of *Xenon* linger in my brain as the come-hither of some hometown temptress into whose see-through tube I have to shoot three balls, the kids are arguing at the other end of the parlor, Gloops has gone to shut them up, and all pinball plungers are plungers through darkness, the man on the horse has leapt off the pier into the briny slop, the thin face of Byron Mungo hovers like a flame at the brink of vision, cupped against the breeze off the sea. I almost fall, then reel away to where the lions and chimps are fidgeting around, ready for the first show.

Then he ungoes, as it were, from the doorway calling, "When I finally closes this place down, for good and ever, there is them as will be sorry. They has nowhere else to try their tricks, to work the poison out of their systems. Day will come they'll say, Ay he was their keeper, as nobody else wanted them." The grammar, spastic and uncouth, lingers in his mind long enough to demand correction. "Which is to say, Dew, my boy, when nobody wanted them. I gives them days by the hour, they has only to go home to sleep. There

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is millionaires up there in Manhattan as pays fortunes to their private clubs for less. And they has all these machines to chop at, and ruin, and shove about. You get the glass clean, swab that floor. I'll be back with a magnifying glass and a pair of white gloves, just like the military. You is lucky you hasn't got stones to whitewash and fences to paint white. Them was the days, when there was spic and span." Now he goes out of control, his face trembling on the threshold. "Spic and span. White as holy veils. I has actually seen that Tefnit tupping a machine and gettin' his rocks to work the only time in a thousand years, and I says to him, that rainy winter day, you take your jackoff home, Tefnit, don't you foul my machine, and next thing he's doin' it to a tree outside, so they says. Least he could have done was arrest hisself." Without his swooping sound of a bird, "*G'nite*," he is gone, to his reward, arguing with the air, the stairs, the entire concept of a parlor, which he owns but tries in vain to control, little knowing (or ignoring the fact) that what the Mungos, the Tefnits, the Pennincks (though these less so) bring in here is a phantom of hope which, through the medium of ballistics and body English, they trade against all that has to be: a free ball is a start, but they will accept a score above two hundred thousand; a free game is a reprieve, though its crack sounds like the final bullet; and a whole series of free games, with everything lit up in the playing area and things lighting up they hadn't even seen before, takes them beyond their lives, beyond life, into a pleasuredrome of eternal jousting, where they plunge and flip, and flip-flip-flip, hands loose and minds at rest, hardly knowing that the game they're playing is the game they almost always lose, and never have to howl at the end, as the ball does something stupid and criminal, the excremental oaths peculiar to pinball parlors. The ball drains and they go, indignant, with it, into the bowels of the mechanism, the unique chance wasted, all momentum spent. I have seen Tefnit take a running kick at his machine and nearly break his foot. Mungo has wept, beating his fist against the glass, like one of the recently bereaved in a Brazilian cemetery (where they keep the dead in drawers with glass fronts).

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Penninck, when he's here, quietly curses the machines in Yiddish, building the curse until it envelops the whole parlor, the other players, the nature of steel, electricity, and in the end the total fallacy of luck's goodness. And I, the gambler of the night, I too have heaved, have heaved up, have yelled in utmost privacy at the machine that takes and takes, when I am not cheating, of course. I have peed into the *Black Knight's* visor, yelled in hysterical high pitch at the cool gibes lisped wholesale from the far end of the *Xenon* tube, and, oh mercy, have cried for it at the round hands of the never-giving (and now gone) *Paragon*, the mostly too-slow *Middle Earth*, the *Flight 2000* with one sticky flipper that works a fraction of a second late, and the once-peppy *Space Riders*, one of whose pop-bumpers has been dead for months.

Nevertheless, the one thing these contraptions teach you is how to lose, or, if you refuse to learn, that you will lose, that you mostly lose, and you discover that the high exhilaration of hitting a million and winning balls galore in a rectangular galaxy of scrambled light is never enough to get you through the times you lose. Some games go sour as soon as you begin. Some, that you don't enjoy defeating, give you free ball after free ball, and only greed tempered by heady exemption makes you go on playing: I'll never win this good again. And on you go, afraid to leave it, certainly at night, when no kid comes to hover at your elbow, his face alive with yearning, and you wave him toward you, tell him to play the five free games racked up, as if you're giving him the plasma of life itself, and go on home, immortal until tomorrow, and potent as a god.

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Luna

The moon as brittle as a tooth

The moon mistaken
For a fortune coming true

Collapses tersely like a compact mirror
Its likeness sending me into a tailspin
My finger swelling
From the uncertainty nearly contained

And yet I admit her sympathy
I permit the telling
Of her story in the streets
Her story splintering apart in midstream
As she lies awake, the object of comment
A settlement of white wood and glass

Then where is she in our union?
Where is she
When the Black Lotus sways?

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Amidst hibiscus and a broth of castile
A woman is lifted by her hips
Her hair pulled tightly from her temples
The way thread is jolted from a spool

With the back of my hand high
To her throat, she recoils
Like a loitering book to her binding
The crane returning
To her alcove of shade

Where wedged between the blueprints of ink
The indolent moon is a truant seed
Refusing to die and refusing to grow
No larger
Than a button or a dime

But hush
Now she listens from her circular booth
Solely to you or solely to me
Guileless as a pearl
With her sad, curved ear
Bowed like the forehead of a geisha girl

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In the Tenth Year of War

I bend
over the machine. Heat
and oil
tune my inner ear. I'm
not ashamed, I
hang my head in
anticipation. Father,
steel smooth and silver,
make my brain new,
Jesus, the dirt on the walls
is coming from my body,
and love,
the spirit coming from your body—
everywhere you look now,
everything you touch,
it's good.
When,
in the tenth year of war
I prayed for help
and no one came,
I danced before the machine.

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I Think about Thigpen Again

I think about Thigpen again.
On the floor in an apartment
on Boston Boulevard, he knows
he's going to die.
I see the record of the criminal court.
Thigpen opens the door,
sees a gun in his face,
pleads, "I don't have
nothing to do with this!"
According to the pathologist
death was caused
by massive tissue destruction,
contusion and swelling of the brain.
In the county morgue
Thigpen's father whispered,
"That's my baby son."
And what must have been said after was,
"You the wrongest person
in the wrongest place,
the wrongest time, Thig."
That was eleven years ago.
Sixteen years ago he stuffed
a basketball into the face
of the Brother Rice forward
who called him a name, and we
went wild. I saw him
in Louis the Hatter's, downtown.
He pointed at my Stetson,
laughed, "You ain't ever
gonna look like a nigger."

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Later, he wrote poems of babies
in frozen tenements,
garbage alive with maggots,
the love a woman makes,
the greasy riders with Detroit skin,
the toughest in the world.

He would be the poet of this hell.

That bullet slicing your brain
isn't poetry, Thigpen.

It's Not Me Shouting at No One

Before dawn, on the street again,
beneath sky that washes me
with ice, smoke, metal.
I don't want to think
the bullet pierced my shoulder,
the junkie's rotten teeth
laughed, his yellow hair froze.
I'm careful: I smoke
Turkish tobacco cigarette butts,
I drink a lot to piss a lot,
I fry the pig in its own fat,
eat the knuckles, brain and stomach;
I don't eat the eyes!
Always four smokestacks
burning bones, somewhere
tears that won't stop,
everywhere blood becomes
flesh that wants to say something.
It's not me shouting at no one
in Cadillac Square: it's God
roaring inside me, afraid
to be alone.

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Eclipse

The dandelion was hidden
That day in June
When the moon eclipsed the prairie
And night at noon
Hung over the barns and silos
Like an ending.

The thousand horseflies in the heat
Fled with the light,
In a tantrum of scripture
And there was night,
Because the first words were retrieved
For the finish.

We sat, stopped in our shadows,
Each in his chair, by a window or door
To see God's face
Come like a twister, over
The midget corn.

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Hermaphroditic Parallels

1.

The cloud lines, braided just above the tool shed and the
telephone wires,
Disentwine,
And fall slowly in hacked parts as the evening moves.
It has its own time to braid
And break, measured and changed,
As the weather lost in an electrical storm
Started the barn on fire.
It took hours to buckle, and the roof hung from stilts.
The ending was unclear.
It burned and then smoked through the afternoon,
And the stone edifice stood perfectly still—
Like the parents of that imbecile, shocked
By the ingenuity it showed in its own destruction.

2.

The grief is as dumb
As that child who wandered around the pasture
And into the woods, lying down a lot and finding culverts
To sit in, with wet pants on two counts,
As pale as Jesus on the cross
With white lashes
And red eyes and a monstrous gender
Dragging around in diapers.
They couldn't put that one anywhere,
Going in and out of the barn
With a stick to hit the chickens, and teeth,
So beautiful, like TV,
In love with candles and bonfires. My Lord,
That ugly kid would rush for the light.

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3.

The parents said nothing, but stood,
Separate stories of unremarkable sin near the burning
Building, in precarious liability,
And it got to be ten o'clock,
And someone got the charred child, the both children
In a blanket, wrapped and generously christened once,
In a long white gown with the sister's lace.
Afterwards, the place became formal, a pyre
In the backyard, as familiar and unfamiliar as the old barn,
Unbraided and unwrought,
Like the alert desire in that dull and swollen body.
Sometimes the Lunestad's little girl plays there
She rocked a small and blackened stone like a doll,
Before she became bored and let it drop.

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Avalanche

I was on top, pressed into the scent
you left at night on the shabby
bed. We were both on acid and you said
the little Czech landlord had snuck down,
begged like a dwarf in the dark. I listened,
counted the cinderblocks that rose, that
fell in the basement wall. I was stiff inside
you, wandering in the snow, deaf with
the slow stomp of blood coming back through
the drug.

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Portfolio

Man Ray

William Wegman

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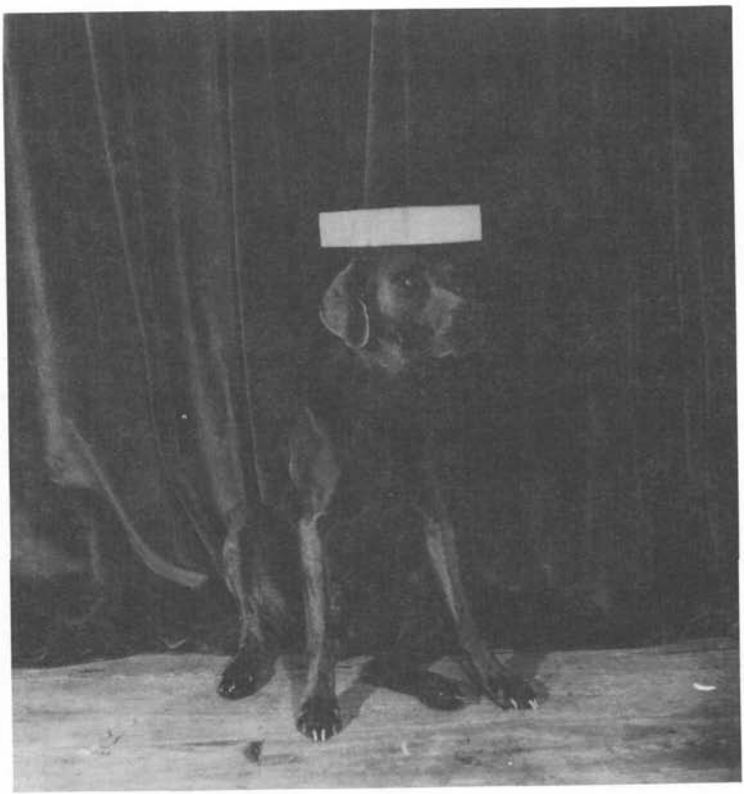

Modeling School 1974

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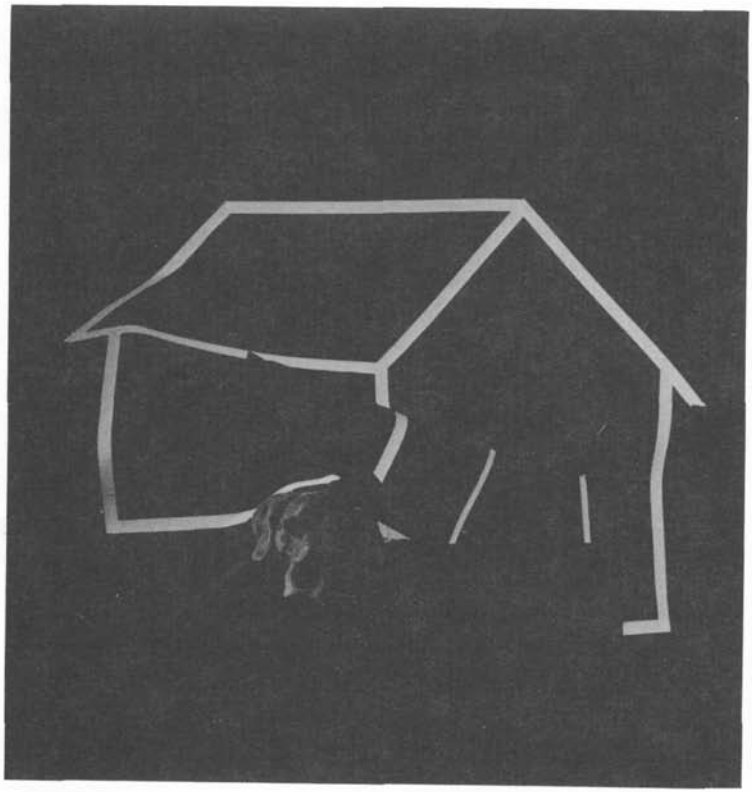

Dog House 1981

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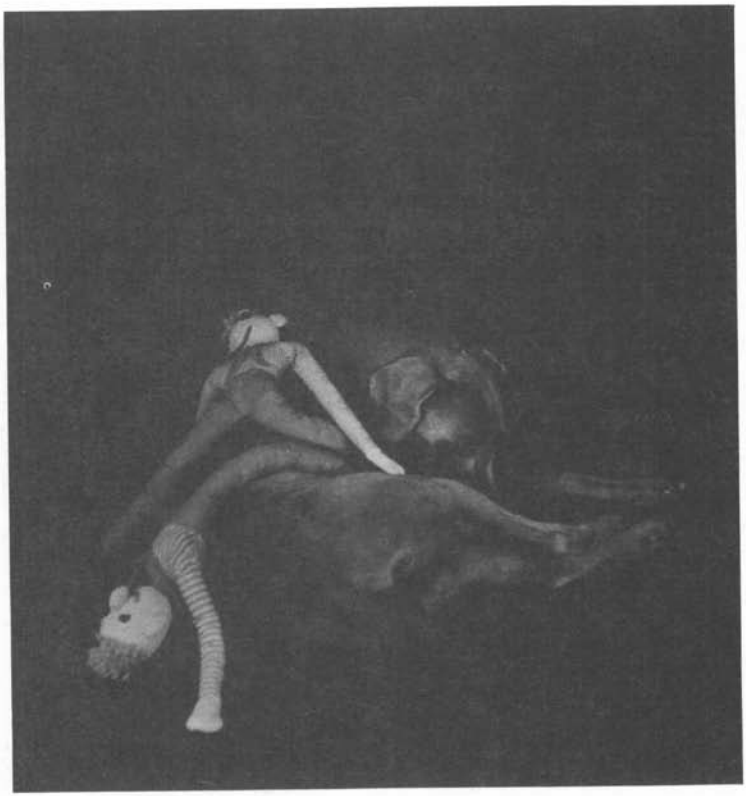

Three Dolls 1976

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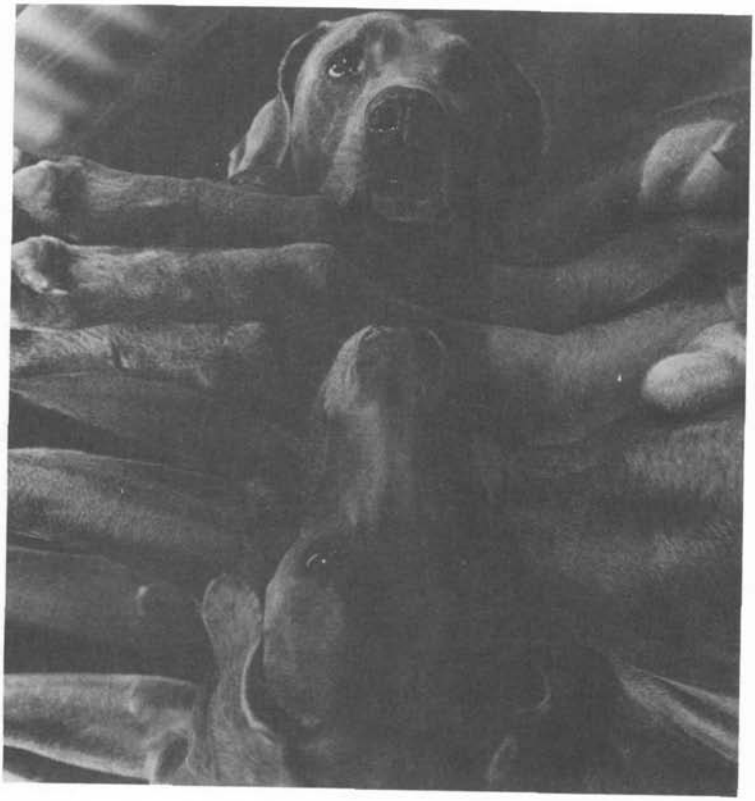

Dog Cabin 1979

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Monument 1982

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Contemplating the Bust of Man Ray 1978

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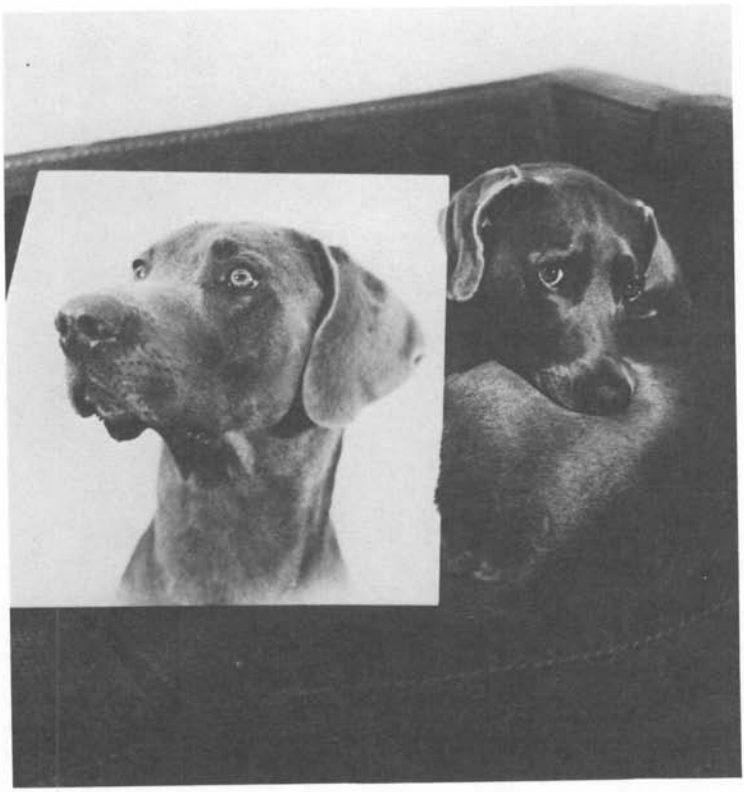

Double Portrait 1973, 1981

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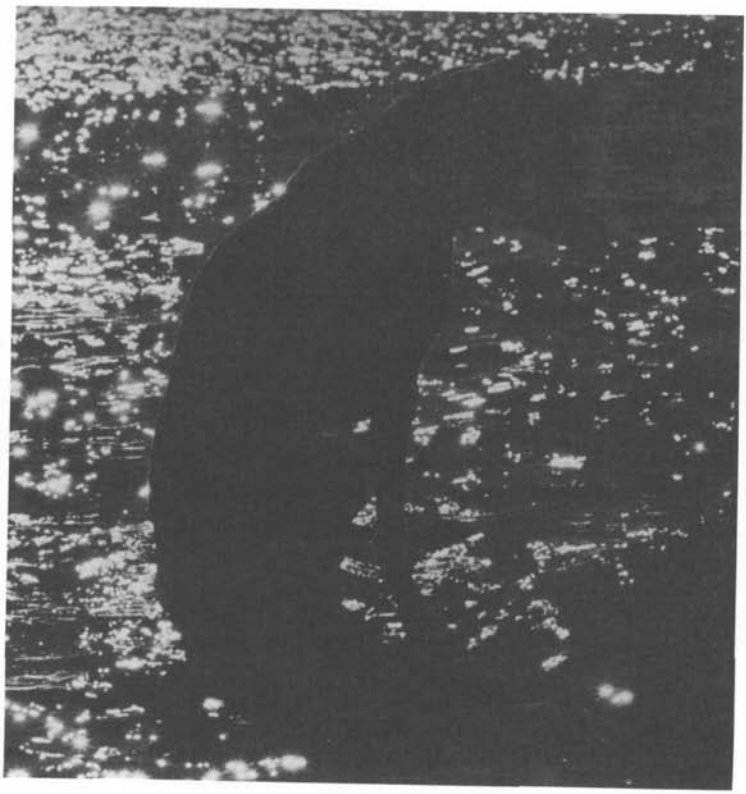

Of the Lake 1976

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Red Dog 1982

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On Mrs. Wegman's Couch (after Courbet) 1982

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Romantic Landscape

Roger Salloch

The Sky Trail was steep and it was too late to walk two hours down Bear Valley to the coast. By taking the Limantour Road, Walter could get his mother to the top of the ridge, then walk with her through the huckleberry thickets and the Douglas firs. It was an easy path. It would take twenty minutes. They could get to the meadow and back before the sun went down.

Do you come here often? Walter's mother wanted to know.

Yes, Walter said, parking the car, I come here often, whenever I want to be alone.

It was September. Berries swarmed on the bushes. As Walter made his way up the hill, he stripped a branch of its fruit. He liked to roll the black beads around his teeth, to break the freshness from their skin. The firmness of the flesh, the juices spitting through his mouth reminded Walter of me, and for a moment Walter chewed the berries, mulled them over, slowly, sensually. Then a distant cough put things right. Walter was not out for a walk with his wife. Walter

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was out for a walk with his mother and he swallowed the mouthful whole. Above him the sky was so blue the branches of the Douglas firs looked black. Around him the day was so still the song of a distant hiker hovered above the hills and Walter looked back at his mother. But there was no point calling the song or the deer that crossed the path between them to her attention. Eyes to the ground, her breath short, his mother labored up the slope.

At the edge of the woods, Walter waited for his mother. There was a rock. He leaned against it. A breeze picked up, then died. The long beach of Limantour Spit gleamed in the distance and off to the right, close to the headlands of the Estero, the Y-shaped yardarms of a dozen fishing smacks held the afternoon and evening in perfect equipoise. It was a good moment. The deep quiet spread to the horizon and beyond, stilling even childhood fears, and shutting his eyes it occurred to Walter that if he ever stopped being an Assistant to the Director (in charge of publications) of the Fund for the Wild and really began to write, it was the kind of moment he ought to remember for a poem.

Look, it's a buzzard.

Walter must have dozed. Opening his eyes, he looked at his mother before he looked at the bird. His mother's head was thrown back, her hands were on her hips. She had a long neck, her cheeks were drained of blood, and trembling in defiance of the effort she had just made, she reminded Walter of the gull feathers one found on the beach after a storm, the ravaged barbs, the stiff, discolored valiant quill.

Or a turkey vulture.

It's a buzzard.

I don't think so. I don't think they have that kind of claw.

What you think, or what you don't think, doesn't make any difference. It's a buzzard.

The bird which had disappeared behind a tree reappeared abruptly above their heads. Night hovered in its wings. It sailed forward effortlessly, and whether it was a turkey vulture or a buzzard did not matter. The Miwok called it Rag-

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man, beggar to death, and as the bird dreamed in spirals above the hills, Walter could feel it preying on his mind. Not that death was imminent. Walter was only thirty-eight. But a month before, watching Walter clamber out of a hot tub, I don't know why I was so cruel, I said, Look, sweetie, I never noticed that before, your thighs don't touch anymore, there's daylight coming through, and when Walter looked, the daylight shone through to a pale countryside, distant yet beckoning where thirty-eight might as well have been sixty and where death was an idea whose time had come.

Walter watched the bird intently. As it rose and fell along the coast, its body changed shapes. Some of the shapes Walter recognized, others he did not want to recognize. If I had been there Walter would have asked me to tell him what I thought the bird looked like, I would have overcome a moment's fear, said I don't know, a bird? and everything would have been all right. But I was not there. I had left Walter a few days before. I didn't want to see his mother. I didn't like her. Oh, I didn't mind the way she was with me. I just couldn't stand the way she was with him. She had been nice to Walter once, when he was two—instead of talking, baby Walter had begun to scream; it went on night after night; finally his mother took him to the country; she held him by the hand; they went on hikes; the hikes got long; Walter got tired; at last, one night, Walter slept, and the next day in the middle of some meadow, Walter raised his finger and pointing at the sun, spoke his first word, Fire—you get the idea, just enough to attach him forever with a long line and a harpoon, imbedded in his heart. We knew that. He knew that. We had talked about it lucidly, we had talked about it drunk. I had even sewed a sampler, Parents are the death of the child, and hung it on the wall of the house. It did no good. Walter took an option on the eternal excuse, she's dying, she's alone; his mother made travel arrangements; I went to stay with friends; and first the turkey vulture became what Walter liked to call the dark meadow between my thighs, but a meadow that was whipped by the wind so that it was angry, inaccessible, and if it wasn't about to blow apart,

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then about to blow away. Then the turkey vulture's claws became some unidentifiable woman without the woman, just her fingers and her tongues. Then its outstretched wings became the long arms of Mr. Ryder conducting the Sea Cliff Young People's Orchestra in 1952. That was Korea, death was in the air then too, and Walter could see himself, nine years old, the cymbalist, waiting in the last row behind the second oboes for his cue. Out front breasts swelled, cigar smoke billowed, and farts cabbaged into the inchoate thickness of the Cold War years to come, while hidden in the rear of the orchestra Walter tried to save himself by imagining acrobatics that would have coupled his virginity with the transparence of pink flesh and blond flocculence he could just make out through a thicket of music stands, the second cellist, Hilde Moser's underarm. A whole hour might go by, enough for two or three moments of ecstasy before Mr. Ryder would nod in his direction. Then he would stand and slowly raise the gleaming disks above his head. And because Walter was already as punctual as the man he would become, he would shut his eyes and simultaneous with the moment when Mr. Ryder stretched his neck and brought down the black baton, he would smash the two brass plates together and the sound would explode like the end of the world between his hands.

I'm talking to you.

What?

I said I don't like those birds.

Why not?

They remind me of death.

Do they? How strange. I was thinking about death myself.

I'm the one who had cancer.

Your gall bladder is gone. You don't have to worry about it anymore.

And you, what do you have to worry about?

Walter pushed himself off the rock. It was an old quarrel. Whenever they were together Walter could never remember what it was about. It wasn't worth pursuing. Eventually

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longstanding disputes buckled in the knees, a question of sheer fatigue. Besides, Walter wasn't a psychiatrist. Walter was an environmentalist. Think birds, Walter told himself. Marvel at the differentiation in the conifers' barks. Consider the rocks.

Look, Walter told his mother.

What is it?

An old farm.

I thought this was a wilderness area.

It is. Fifty years from now that farm won't be here.

It shouldn't be here now.

I don't know.

I do.

I suppose I'm jaded by too much wilderness.

What is jaded supposed to mean?

Tired in a way.

You're like your father.

Why?

He was tired too.

Momentarily, Walter thought about his father. He saw him on his deathbed. His pallor was ghastly. Long wrinkles eroded the basin of his cheeks. Only his nose seemed defiant, mythically arch and vibrant, beyond the reach of what would become his corpse. He was crying and Walter remembered my story about my father, how he had died with the biggest erection I had ever seen. Walter's father didn't have an erection, Walter's father only had tears, and after Walter thought that, he wanted to stop thinking about his father entirely, but he had to say something so he said I loved him, to which his mother retorted, I loved him too.

For the next ten minutes they walked in silence. Walter tried to calculate the volume of water in our hot tub but he couldn't remember whether Pi was 3.1742 or 3.7142. Then he tried to find some more huckleberries but the bushes he saw were too far into the woods and there was the danger of poison oak. Finally Walter just thought about me. He pulled his shoulders back. He pushed his chest out. He stretched his arms above his head. He did all the things I had taught him

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to stand up straight. But I did not materialize and his mother did not disappear. It had always been that way. From boarding school to the Gobi, from a summa cum laude to the seven continental divides, from the award for academic achievement in kindergarten to the age of thirty-eight, his reach had never made it past his grasp—on higher call. For example, had he ever told anybody what he really thought about the wilderness they peddled at the Fund? He thought a lot of it fringed on porn. In all those calendars and picture books of glossy sempiternity he could show anyone more than a shot or two they had chosen just because it was the closest thing to what went on in the middle of the centerfold of every girlie magazine. Once or twice, looking down the gullet of a particularly verdant valley, he himself had even gotten aroused. But what was the point talking about such things? There was no point. Higher call. Higher call.

Are we almost there?

We are there.

Walter's mother looked around. Two fallow deer grazed indifferently on the hill opposite.Where the sea converged with the sky, a formation of pelicans distilled from the day a final gesture of inviolate elegance. Clouds tumbled from mountain peaks of heat and the sun took pictures of its last decisive moments on the earth. The inventory of wonder was complete.

Ognuno sta solo
Sul cuor della terra
Trafitto da un raggio di sole
Ed e subito sera.

Walter's mother smiled. She liked it when Walter recited poetry.

And the translation?

Each man stands alone
In the heart of the earth
Struck by a ray of the sun
And suddenly it's evening.

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From the collected works of Quasimodo, Feltrinelli, 1956, I think.

Now I remember, Walter's mother said. But it's much more beautiful in Italian. Why didn't you put that on the calendar?

Wilderness is not Italian.

It was June 1974, no?

No, it was September 1977.

Dawn in the Aleutians.

No, sunset off the coast of Maui.

Are you sure?

Yes.

That was my favorite.

I know.

Would you do me a favor?

Why not?

Perhaps it would offend your principles.

What principles?

You're thirty-eight, you've built a life you know.

I've put up a lot of scaffolding.

You've brought the call of the wild to a million homes.

The call of the wild: What about the whisper of the hearth, the story by the fireside?

Unhappy marriages are an unhappy fact of life.

I wasn't thinking about my marriage, and who said it was unhappy anyway?

What were you thinking about?

The story by the fireside.

What story is that?

I wish I knew.

Walter's mother smiled, momentously. It was one of her favorite expressions. She had used it the day Albert Camus drove his sports car into a tree. She had used it the day Dag Hammarskjold's plane had crashed in the Congo. She had used it the day Adlai Stevenson died of a heart attack on a London street. She had used it the day she told Walter his father had only made love to her once in his life. She had used it every time Walter said he thought maybe one day he

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would write. (Write? she would say with her smile, I wanted to write too, I wrote beautifully as a little girl, and then to explain why she hadn't written beautifully after she was a little girl, she would tell the story about standing in line on Ellis Island while a famous magician from Hamburg discovered he could no longer pull a scarf out of a hat: It was so sad. Then he tried to make an ace of hearts disappear, and when he succeeded after two failures, they found it on the floor. After that, in desperation, he took an orange and an egg from the bag of another immigrant, and he said he would turn them into apples. But the orange and the egg vanished, the apple never materialized, the other man got angry, the magician panicked, the egg turned up smashed in his left breast pocket, and the orange was lost.) It was a smile made of the crushed hopes she had always had for others, a smile around which she had built the rectitude of the rest of her face, a smile that looked as though it were designed to last forever. But then slowly, or rather with all deliberate speed, like a naval fleet disappearing over the horizon, bound for some distant engagement, and so momentously, as though nothing had ever happened before, as though this were it, Story at last, Walter's mother's smile was dispelled, and then abruptly replaced with a hand that became a fist that became Walter's fingers grappling with his mother's wrist, trying to prevent the hideous noises that were coming from her throat.

What on earth are you doing?

Forgive me Walter.

Forgive you? Forgive you for what?

Walter's mother stared at him. Tears came to her eyes. She began to talk. And after a while, Walter began to listen: And I sometimes ask myself, she said, what would have happened if that first walk had been different. Oh I know you think I did the right thing, held you by the hand, got you to talk. But can't you see how brutal I was? Think of those tiny legs Walter. You were only two. Poor baby, you were so exhausted. You have to forgive me Walter. I'm going to die. You can't imagine how guilty I've always been.

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Walter shut his eyes. He put his own fist in his mouth and, biting hard, tried to stop the flow of fantasy. But it spilled over anyway and Walter saw himself with his arms clutched around his mother's hips. He was not as strong as he had once been but he had no difficulty lifting her and holding her above his head. She was light, so light: There was a photograph of her as a young woman, a long distance swimmer, her head in a bathing cap, her body covered with oils. It was this sleek ample creature that always swam elusively through Walter's dreams and now the mere thought of her fragility, her nothingness, exhilarated him. He could drop her, of course, but there were any number of other things he could do too. He could hurl her into that tree. He could run towards the bluff and propel her into the deepening gloam. Or like a dervish he could spin round and round until he lost her in a trance.

How long Walter contemplated these choices he did not know. But it was some time for when his mother's screams finally penetrated his ears, her nails had dug into his skin, her knuckles had petrified around his throat. He pried her loose. Her screams diminished. Whimpers replenished her emotions now. They were not the whimpers of pain. Beneath her cardigan there was her tee-shirt and beneath her tee-shirt two rugged nipples rose like the heads of nails come up from the warping of a board.

Walter opened his eyes. His mother was standing where she had been standing before. She was watching him, as though waiting for a reaction, and after a moment she said, Well? Well what? Walter wanted to know, touching his neck on the spot where it seemed to him he could still feel her nails beneath his skin. Do you forgive me? Walter nearly laughed. What's the matter? Walter's mother said and Walter said he was thinking about something else. Then he added, Of course, I forgive you, and then his mother asked him what else he was thinking about. Walter looked at her. Oddly enough, he said, suicide, at least I think, and when his mother gasped, he told her, But don't worry about it, I couldn't commit suicide, even if I wanted to, I wouldn't know whom

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to shoot. Then Walter saw that his mother didn't think he was funny and to reassure her he told her he wasn't thinking about suicide at all. Actually, he said, I was thinking about Becky. I was thinking when she came back I would tell her about our walk this afternoon. I was thinking maybe she could write a story about it even if I never could. Walter's mother didn't like that either. I don't see what Becky has to do with all of this, she said, do you have to tell her everything, can't we have a secret, just us two? Walter smiled. I'll tell you a secret, he said, and when his mother looked eager he said, Do you want to know what our next books at the Fund are going to be about? Walter's mother wanted to know, and Walter told her: Estuaries, he said, estuaries, and ice.

Walter lifted his head. The sky was dark blue. Below the sky the trees were dark purple and below the trees the ground was black. I think we better go Walter said. Did you bring a flashlight? Walter's mother asked, I don't want to fall. Walter took out his flashlight. Hills huddled in the darkness. Bats flew through trees and Walter's mother walked ahead in the cone of light. At one point she turned around and stretched out her hand. She had picked some huckleberries and they lay still in her palm. Walter ate one. The berries had been in the shadows of the forest all afternoon and the coldness of the fruit entered Walter's heart. Walter ate the rest. Then a Great Horned Owl melted through the darkness. Walter's mother sensed the bird. What was that? Walter said, Whooo, who, whoo. The bird replied, Whoo, whoooooo. A woman, Walter said, a woman of the night. Walter's mother laughed. I always said you had a brilliant imagination, she told Walter. Maybe you should have been a writer after all. Then she continued down the path. Her skirt was cut at the calf and in the beam from the lamp her sandles slapped against her feet and her thin ankles danced like bones.

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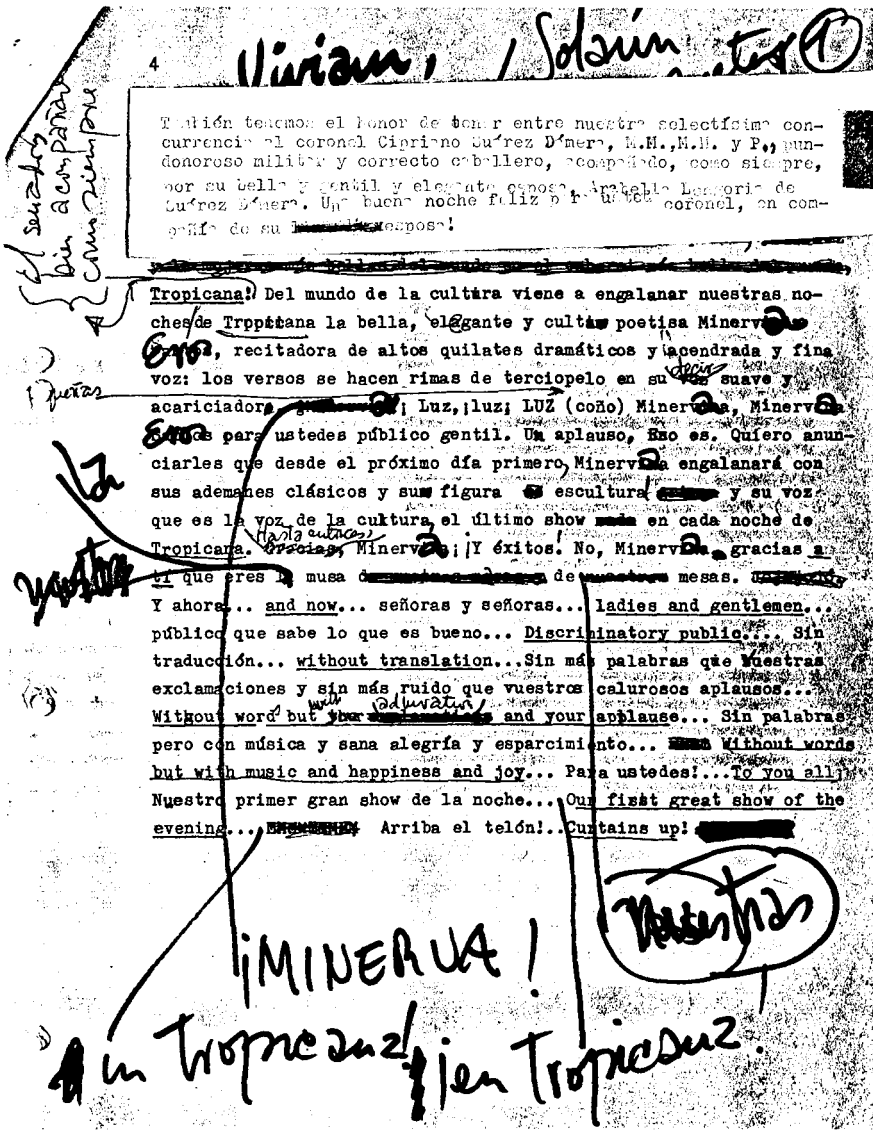
4
Tropicana! Del mundo de la cultura viene a engalanar nuestras noches de Tropicana la bella, elegante y culta poetisa Minerva
recitadora de altos quilates dramáticos y acendrada y fina voz: los versos se hacen rimas de terciopelo en su voz suave y
acariciadora
Luz, ¡luz; LUZ (coño) Minerva, Minerva
para ustedes público gentil. Un aplauso, Eso es. Quiero anunciarles que desde el próximo día primero Minerva engalanará con sus ademanes clásicos y su figura escultura y su voz que es la voz de la cultura el último show en cada noche de Tropicana.
Minerva; ¡Y éxitos. No, Minerva, gracias a ti que eres la musa de
Y ahora... and now... señoras y señoras... ladies and gentlemen... público que sabe lo que es bueno... Discriminatory public... Sin traducción... without translation...Sin más palabras que vuestras exclamaciones y sin más ruido que vuestros calurosos aplausos...
Without word but
and your applause... Sin palabras pero con música y sana alegría y esparcimiento... Without words but with music and happiness and joy... Para ustedes!...To you all! Nuestro primer gran show de la noche...Our first great show of the evening... Arriba el telón!..Curtains up!
¡MINERVA!
¡en Tropicana!
¡en Tropicana!

A Guillermo Cabrera Infante manuscript page from the prelude to Three Trapped Tigers.

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Nestor Almendros

Cabrera Infante with Miriam Gómez

The Art of Fiction LXXV

Guillermo Cabrera Infante

Guillermo Cabrera Infante was born on April 22, 1929, in Gibara, a small town on the northern coast of the Cuban province of Oriente—also the birthplace of Fulgencio Batista and Fidel Castro. Because his parents were members of the Communist Party, the family was obliged to move to Havana in 1941. He grew up with a double interest: literature and cinema. In 1947, he published his first story and in 1951 he founded the Cinemateca de Cuba. Briefly jailed in 1952 for publishing a tale containing English profanities, he had to write under a pseudonym: G. Cain.

Cain became Cuba's best-known film critic. In 1957, he took part in underground, anti-Batista activities. When Batista abdicated (December 31, 1958), he worked on the newspaper Revolución, *as editor of the Monday literary supplement. He traveled in the entourage of Fidel Castro through the U.S. and Latin America. In 1960, he published his first book of stories,* As In Peace, So In War. *By 1961, his relation with the Castro government had soured:* Lunes, *the literary supplement, was*

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banned. He was named cultural attaché in Brussels in 1962, the same year G. Cain published his collected film reviews (with a preface by G. Cabrera Infante).

The manuscript version of Three Trapped Tigers *was nominated for the Prix Formentor in 1965. That same year Cabrera Infante returned to Havana for his mother's funeral and left Cuba forever on October 3. He remained in Madrid until October of 1966, when he moved to London, where he lives today.*

His publications available in English include: Three Trapped Tigers *(1971),* View of Dawn in the Tropics *(1978), the essay "Bites From the Bearded Crocodile"* (London Review of Books, *June 1981). His most recent novel,* La Habana para un infante difunto *(1979), is currently being translated with the provisional title* Infante's Inferno.

This interview took place in 1982, during the spring semester at the University of Virginia where Cabrera Infante was a visiting professor. It was conducted in the living room of the house Cabrera Infante and his wife of twenty-one years, the actress Miriam Gómez, had rented for the semester—a charming, yellow, mock-Georgian home which belongs to an English professor. It is decorated in a loosely eighteenth-century style, and contains a large collection of books, mostly by eighteenth-century style, British authors.

Cabrera Infante, a devotee of small work spaces, himself a smallish person, works upstairs in a tiny, untidy study adjacent to the master bedroom. When he is not writing or talking on the telephone, he birdwatches, joining Miriam Gómez, binoculars and Peterson Guide *in hand among the trees surrounding the house, or peruses* TV Guide *in pursuit of old movies.*

The high-ceilinged living room where we talk is decorated with prints of Hogarth's Rake's Progress. *Outside, a subject of great interest to Naso, the family cat, are large numbers of cardinals, robins, and starlings gathered to eat the seeds Miriam Gómez has scattered for them—her desire to feed and watch birds in conflict with her love for cats. Above the sofa where Cabrera Infante sits, Hogarth's women crowd around the*

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drunken Rake and provide a curious counterpoint to the interview: their silent brawling mocks our supposedly genteel conversation.

INTERVIEWER

How do you write?

CABRERA INFANTE

Do you mean the position I assume at the desk?

INTERVIEWER

No, no. I mean your writing habits.

CABRERA INFANTE

In fact I don't really write all that much. I type. Nowadays I type on my brand-new Praxis 35, an Olivetti made in Japan—the old Rome-Tokyo Axis now become a merger. The problem is that this typewriter, instead of becoming unruly like all my old typewriters and old girlfriends, started out imitating my wife, Miriam Gómez, by trying to do my thinking for me. It's like living in a totalitarian state. No wonder they named it Praxis. That's what Marxists call "thought in action." Praxis may make perfect for them, but not for me.

INTERVIEWER

Do you jot down notes on the typewriter too?

CABRERA INFANTE

I used to, but the notes became pages and sometimes short stories. I write down notes in my acromegalic handwriting, with letters as big as fingers on a small pocket notebook or on steno pads, which I keep everywhere—on my desk, my night table, in the kitchen. Steno pads should have a better name...

INTERVIEWER

What better name could they have?

CABRERA INFANTE

Sterno pads. In honor of Laurence Sterne, digressor.

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INTERVIEWER

Sterne? Lots of critics—to say nothing of students forced to read him—attack him because of his digressions.

CABRERA INFANTE

I don't have to defend Sterne; he is his own defense, the Sterne line. And I certainly agree when he says that "digressions are the sunshine, the life, the soul of reading."

INTERVIEWER

Swift was no less devoted to digression than Sterne. What do you think of him?

CABRERA INFANTE

The digressor as aggressor. The difference is that Swift was all *saeva indignatio* and that savage indignation was the motor of all his writings. You couldn't find a less playful writer among his contemporaries. Compared to Swift, Pope was a stand-up comedian.

INTERVIEWER

You seem to have an affinity for English eighteenth-century satire—something people might not expect from a Cuban writer. How do you understand satire, as a literary genre?

CABRERA INFANTE

Look, my friend, who knows what to expect from a Cuban writer, or any writer anywhere? Why not Sterne and Swift? Or Armor and Swift? At best, satire is didactic. At worst, political. This means that satires are not ludic or playful but just the opposite. They are the play wherein the satirist catches the conscience of the audience, which is why they are so closely related to sermons, religious tracts, and political pamphlets. Personally, I feel closer to Swift's motto, "Vive la bagatelle," than to his epitaph. Long live trivia! Where he and I part company is the grave, where his satire is most serious, and where I would rather turn that bagatelle into "bag-a-Stella." Swift wanted to use satire, literature, "to mend the World." To me this makes writing, which should be an end in itself—

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literature—into something political. Any literary work that aspires to the condition of art must forget politics, religion, and, ultimately, morals. Otherwise it will be a pamphlet, a sermon, or a morality play. Even the greatest moralist of our century, Joseph Conrad, was first and foremost an entertainer.

INTERVIEWER

What would you say about Solzhenitsyn?

CABRERA INFANTE

Solzhenitsyn is a failed artist but a very successful moralist. His novels are pretentious junk, but his political writing, *The Gulag Archipelago* books for example, are precious masterpieces of indictment.

INTERVIEWER

Is George Orwell, then, also a failure?

CABRERA INFANTE

Yes, a failure as an artist, but a superb pamphleteer. His political essays, together with Camus's, are the best written in Europe since World War II. These men are heroes because they fight swords with words—but that doesn't make them artists.

INTERVIEWER

You raise the difficult problem of reading. How do we read a satirist such as Swift?

CABRERA INFANTE

A critic or, let's say an attentive reader, reads *Gulliver's Travels* and decides that Swift must either be right as an artist and wrong as a moralist or the other way around. But Swift had no such problem: he was concerned with moral issues and with deploying his arguments with the best rhetorical devices he could muster. He succeeds as an artist, but to appreciate that aspect of his work we have to set aside his moral issues. Mind you, deep down he was right about something we are not ready to admit, namely, that man is a beast, a predator, evil without redemption.

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INTERVIEWER

What about the fact that Swift was Dean Swift, a cleric?

CABRERA INFANTE

That's a big problem for Swiftians: Swift believed man to be rotten through-and-through. For him the only hope for humanity lay in beasts. The whole structure of eighteenth-century faith in the goodness of man collapses at the first whinny of the Houyhnhnm. That's where the slogan "Four legs good, two legs bad" really originated. But Swift was serious where Orwell was mischievous.

INTERVIEWER

Do you agree with this misanthropic theory?

CABRERA INFANTE

Totally. I think Creation, Evolution, or, what it is probably—Chance—made a mistake. Man is the most dangerous mistake in the universe, a glorious but miserable mistake. He is about to destroy the entire planet, and it's the rest of Nature that will pay for it. Man, to put it in Swiftian terms Swift could never utter, is the cancer of the planet!

INTERVIEWER

Is that exclamatory tone the one you use in the pulpit?

CABRERA INFANTE

All right, you're right. The tone is too high, but the tune is true. Besides, I share Swift's love for horses and women. The difference is that I like to play with women and he lacked any erotic vocation. He was sexually active, but I think he spurned intercourse finally because while he liked the foreplay he hated what Sade loved and Yeats lamented—that sex takes place in the site of the excreta. Add to that the idea that sex meant entering a body in the places where foul things were trying to exit. Remember that in the eighteenth century sex was a prelude to venereal disease, or, even worse, the procreation of evil. You know, I think "A Modest Proposal" is meant as much as a form of belated birth control as a comic

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remedy for poverty and hunger in Ireland. He knew that if horses (the perfect animal) were to survive, man had to cease to exist. The notion that a beast could be more perfect than man was, of course, perfectly un-Christian, so he has to be read as a comic writer or as a madman. We defuse his message by turning him into a humanist, the author of a children's book.

INTERVIEWER

Perhaps we might return to Swift on the matter of digression.

CABRERA INFANTE

We never left it: this was a digression on aggression.

INTERVIEWER

Let me be specific: could you have written Swift's "Digression in Praise of Digressions"?

CABRERA INFANTE

I'll answer if you use the Johnsonian "Sir" to ask me.

INTERVIEWER

Just this once then: "Sir."

CABRERA INFANTE

Thank you. Yes, I could have written most of it, especially the part about having heard of many attempts to write the *Iliad* in a nutshell and having seen a nutshell in an *Iliad.* And that quip that people use books as men use lords: they only know their titles but claim their acquaintance. I also like the way he sets up a polemic so he can attack both sides. One fault: Swift begs the reader's pardon for "digressing from himself" and claims it's a necessity. This for Sterne would be an *excusatio non petita.*

INTERVIEWER

What literary device does Swift's writing hinge on?

CABRERA INFANTE

Parody, sheer parody. If he weren't a parodist he couldn't have written "A Modest Proposal." And *Gulliver's Travels* is

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a parody of travel literature and, of course, *Robinson Crusoe*. There is an important parodic strain that runs through most of my favorite English writers: Swift, Sterne, even Lewis Carroll. In fact, the three could be said to have written a single book, with chapters called *A Tale of a Tub*, *Sentimental Journey*, and *Sylvie and Bruno*. Their remote ancestor is the *Satyricon* with which they share a will to fragmentation and black humor.

INTERVIEWER

None seems terribly concerned with plot, or, for that matter, character.

CABRERA INFANTE

I don't know what plot and character are. Dickens created all possible (and impossible) characters, so that takes care of character. And plot, for me, belongs in mystery stories and movies. I am concerned with literary space, which is language, and not literary time. When we talk about character, we inevitably drift toward psychology: Choderlos Laclos was the first and the last to use it properly.

INTERVIEWER

You know, you manage to make Swift, Sterne, and even Carroll sound rather melancholy.

CABRERA INFANTE

Mea culpa! Don't forget we live a heritage of humorless thinkers like Kierkegaard, Heidegger, or Sartre. When you have a sense of humor, you can laugh off your philosophic melancholy even when you know the joke is on you. I'll bet none of those English writers we've mentioned really believed in God.

INTERVIEWER

Even Reverend Dodgson?

CABRERA INFANTE

He was too good a logician to believe in so absurd a Maker. I think he believed man was made by the daughter of Chance and Fate, Miss Fortune.

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INTERVIEWER

How does all this British misanthropy, parody, satire, and humor relate to your first major book, *Three Trapped Tigers?*

CABRERA INFANTE

TTT is an English book written elsewhere. It's not British and it's not short, but at least it's nasty and therefore true to life.

INTERVIEWER

The word "sad" is in the Spanish title: why did you excise that hint to the reader in the translation?

CABRERA INFANTE

In *Tres tristes tigres*, sadness is just a word, part of a tongue-twister that means nothing. *Three Sad Tigers*, at best, sounds like the title of a children's book. It's not a happy book, but I tried to make it one because, with Jefferson, I feel man has a right to the pursuit of happiness.

INTERVIEWER

I'm not sure, but I think Jefferson first put the word property where happiness is today.

CABRERA INFANTE

Then like an American Proudhon, I can say that happiness is theft. I should write a sequel to *TTT*, in which the writer Silvestre would find the actor Arsenio Cué a fugitive from a soap opera, unkempt and unshaved. Before disappearing, Cué would parody Paul Muni's memorable last words in *I Was a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* to answer Silvestre's question about how he was doing and say, "I steal."

INTERVIEWER

Since you mention *TTT*, I would like to ask you some questions about your other books. Why have you disowned your first book, the story-cycle *Asi en paz como en la guerra* (1960)?

CABRERA INFANTE

There's juvenilia in that book but also some senilia. It was

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mostly written when I started writing movie criticism in the mid-fifties. I have nothing against the stories. In fact, half a dozen or so may be salvageable. But it's the book itself I object to.

INTERVIEWER

But why?

CABRERA INFANTE

Because it's a book not written but collected under the perverse influence of Sartre and his idea that a writer must not only write about a moment in History (like Marx he always capitalized the word), but also comment on his writing as well. Sartre also demands that the writer include *all* of society. It's esthetically hideous, a kind of social realism with a human face or a species of naturalism with a socialist conscience. Believe me, that book was collated with evil glue.

INTERVIEWER

I've heard it said that you actually began writing because after you read Miguel Angel Asturias's *El señor presidente* (1941) you said that you could certainly do no worse than Asturias. Is that true, and, if so, where is the story?

CABRERA INFANTE

It's true; the year was 1947, the yarn was published in the magazine *Bohemia*, but if you think I'm going to talk about it you're crazy.

INTERVIEWER

I see, you're not only modest but discreet. Perhaps instead you'd tell me about the publication history of *TTT*, how it began life as a book called *View of Dawn in the Tropics*?

CABRERA INFANTE

It's a simple story. The book that won the Spanish Biblioteca Breve Prize in Barcelona in 1964 was vetoed by Franco's censors. That happened while I was forcibly detained in Cuba in 1965. Then I had second thoughts about the book. I began toying with the idea of changing it and wrote what is now the final fragment, "Bachata." When I finally

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managed to get out of Cuba, I found out what had happened to the old manuscript. I rewrote it all then and there under the new title, which was its title before it won the prize. There was still some censoring, but there was lots of genuine rewriting.

INTERVIEWER

The way you link the two, it would seem the censor was also a kind of editor.

CABRERA INFANTE

As a matter of fact, that Spanish censor was more creative than my publisher or any of his editors. He made twenty-two cuts, mostly concerning the female bosom, his fondest obsession. Wherever I wrote "tits," he substituted "breasts." He eliminated oral indelicacies of any kind—even though such things do not abound in *TTT*, which is rather a chaste book about friendship rather than sex. But the censor had more than sex on his mind, especially if men were involved, so if a character went to a military academy and turned into a homosexual later on, the censor simply crossed out "military" making the academy more Platonic than Prussian. At the end of the book, the censor got really creative. The ending is a long speech by a madwoman I had copied down years before and was now using as an Epilogue. The old woman talked endlessly, always repeating herself. She was a religious fanatic, damning Catholicism, the Pope, and priests. The censor cut all that and with it all that was repetitious and neorealist in the speech. The last sentence in his version, all in lower case and without punctuation was *cant go no further*. Who could ask for a better ending?

INTERVIEWER

Your readers in English have *TTT* and the collection of vignettes from Cuban history called *View of Dawn in the Tropics* (1974) available to them, but they have had little opportunity to read your nonfiction. Would you comment on that other side of your writing?

CABRERA INFANTE

Gladly. I'll begin with a book called, depending on the

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reader, *Oh* or *Zero—O* (1975) in Spanish. It's a combination of previously published pieces and some essays I wrote for the book. The one I like best is "An Innocent Pornographer." It's about Corin Tellado, a writer of cheap, romantic novels—the kind called *novela rosa* or rosy romance in Spanish. She is the most widely read author writing in Spanish today and has been manufacturing a novelette a week for the past twenty-five or thirty years. I'm proud to say that I was the first person to write about her seriously and that since the time of my essay (mid-1967), she has been the subject of countless articles, interviews, even television programs. Nobody saw that the essay was written with a tongue in my rosy cheek.

INTERVIEWER

Your other book of essays seems closer to your literary writing. Why is that?

CABRERA INFANTE

Exorcismos de esti(l)o (1976) is definitely another kettle of fish. The title is obviously an homage to Raymond Queneau and, at the same time, an advertisement for itself because of its complicated asymmetry. It means many things: the exorcizing of style, exercises in summertime, even the lure of the pen—all in a send-up of *Exercises de Style*. This is one of my favorites among my own books and it closes the cycle begun in my collected movie reviews, *Un oficio del siglo xx* (1962). In *Exorcismos*, I expanded my experience (not experiment, a word I loathe when I see it applied to art instead of science) with Havanese, the idiom of *habaneros*, who might perhaps be called *hablaneros* or total talkers. Most of it was written while I was a cultural attaché at the Cuban embassy in Brussels (1962)—and it shows. It contains many messages from an Edmond Dantés, who read his own name as Inmundo Dantesco, the prisoner of Ifs, waiting for some Abbé Faria and passing time scratching graffiti on the filthy walls of his cell. One of the writings on the wall is a piece on Brillat-Savarin (1765-1826), the gourmet and amateur musician trapped by the French Revolution. I also like a short (one page) biography of Stalin's embalmer, a man the tyrant exiled

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to Siberia. I can still feel the embalmer's ghoulish glee as he ripped open the belly of the beast. For a moment I was the embalmer and Stalin had a Spanish name.

INTERVIEWER

Un oficio del siglo xx (1962) is more than a collection of film reviews. After all, you write there about your own pseudonym, G. Cain, as if he were deceased. How do you understand the book?

CABRERA INFANTE

As a novel. The Prologue, the Intermission, and the Epilogue are biographical comments on G. Cain, the critic. The reviews, his criticism, are the corpus—that is, his body. The whole book is a rite of passage conducted over his dead body. That's what a novel is, don't you think?

INTERVIEWER

If you say so. What about the title though, how would you like it translated?

CABRERA INFANTE

I'm finicky about titles. I'd like it as ambiguous as possible. Not *A Trade of the Twentieth Century* but *A Twentieth Century Job*. This gives readers an embarassing choice: is it a job lot or Job or just a job. A better title might be *Job's Lot*, so everything would go to Cain's heirs.

INTERVIEWER

I want you to talk about your literary-political writings, particularly "Bites from the Bearded Crocodile," which appeared in the *London Review of Books* (June, 1981).

CABRERA INFANTE

That article *had* to be written. It's original title was "Culture in Castro's Cuba: the Renaissance that Never Was." Let's go back in history a bit: the first time I ever attempted to write anything of a literary-political nature was in July of 1968, to answer an interview for an Argentine magazine, *Primera plana*, that was a combination of *L'Express* and *Time*. It caused a scandal. Just imagine: a person (me) whose parents

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were founders of the Cuban Communist Party, who wrote in his youth for *Hoy*, the Party newspaper, who was brought up in grinding poverty, who struggled to become a writer, who became Cuba's first real film critic, the youngest editor of a high-circulation magazine, then founding editor of the most influential literary supplement in the Spanish-speaking world, who then becomes a diplomat in the Castro government, who leaves Cuba silently—and all of a sudden shouts from a London rooftop that the mighty king is a naked tyrant.

INTERVIEWER

Why did you feel the time had come to speak out?

CABRERA INFANTE

There are too many people who go around saying that despite shortcomings the Revolution has at least done a great job on education and public health. This is like praising Hitler for pulling Germany out of the economic quagmire of the Weimar Republic and exactly like those damned Italian trains that always arrived on time under Mussolini. Those fellow train travelers were saying this time that culture was now a big thing in Cuba because Fidel Castro had taught everybody to read and write. What's the use of being literate if you lack the freedom to write, publish, and read what you want? The Sforzas, the Gonzagas, and of course the Medicis were upstarts and boors compared to this Cuban *condottiere*, this self-made patron of the arts and sciences. These were, of course, the lies of the land. The article, by the way, has been widely translated—even into Norwegian and Japanese!

INTERVIEWER

The article on Cuba was a spontaneous response to a political situation, but your essay on the fate of the writers José Lezama Lima and Virgilio Piñera under the Castro regime—a masterpiece in my opinion—is of a different nature. How does it fit in with your other writings?

CABRERA INFANTE

With me you always have to begin with the title. "*Vidas para leerlas*" may be roughly translated as "Lives to be Read,"

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but that way you lose the Plutarchian pun, because "Parallel Lives" and "Lives to be Read" sound very similar in Spanish. Understanding this play on words is essential for understanding the whole piece. Here I must refer to another Cuban writer (living in France), Severo Sarduy, a disciple of Piñera and a follower of Lezama, who wrote a book of essays on writing called *Written on a Body*. The notions of writing on human skin and living lives to be read are complementary and apposite for writers like Piñera and Lezama, who were very different writers, the one writing stark, naked prose and the other composing heavily ornate poems and preciously robed prose. At the same time, they were both very sensual writers, both homosexuals who suffered because of it. I wrote the lives of the poet after the poet's death, which I think is not different from writing fiction.

INTERVIEWER

The pun is your trademark, but why use it when you are being serious?

CABRERA INFANTE

That's just the point. Writing for me, even what you call serious writing, is play. Puns, you see, are words whose meaning depends on play; it's the player who calls the shots. A great player, Lewis Carroll, saw that, but being a reverend he put the words in Humpty Dumpty's mouth. The question about language is not who is right or wrong but, in the old Hegelian scheme, who is the master and who the slave? Puns are my freedom and my control.

INTERVIEWER

Since you pun in so many of your titles, I suppose we'd better go back to them: please explain why you say your titles are the essence of your work.

CABRERA INFANTE

The title always comes first, to me and to the reader. I've written many stories and articles just by doggedly following the title. Sometimes I use a working title, sometimes I find a title suitable for a given subject. Take my most recent novel,

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La Habana para un infante difunto (1979). It had a different title when I began: *Las confesiones de agosto*, a clever allusion to confession and to Saint Augustine's *Confessions*. I had begun writing the book in August, so that was included as well. Then one day I heard a title, *La Habana para un infante difunto*, just like that, the same way Saint Augustine heard the voice in the garden. With the new title in mind, I rewrote the whole book.

INTERVIEWER

So you believe in inspiration?

CABRERA INFANTE

Let's call it *embullo*, a Cuban word that means easy eagerness, a particularly gracious way of climbing on the bandwagons of the mind. I write every time the Holy Ghost whispers some sweet something in my ear. Of course I also write to meet deadlines, but that's not really writing. Sometimes it comes just because I sit down at the typewriter.

INTERVIEWER

Speaking of inspiration, and a prolonged one at that, *La Habana para un infante difunto* is almost eight hundred pages long and yet it has outsold all your other books. Why?

CABRERA INFANTE

Filth, my dear Mac Adam, filth. It is the first truly erotic book written in Spanish—a language and a literature that recoils in horror at living filth. That's what made it a best seller. My first big book, *TTT*, is about friendship, and *La Habana* is about love, the biography of a single-minded character's search for the tamed screw. But in both books disillusion outlasts love. In *TTT*, friendship breeds betrayal, and in *La Habana*, before the flowers of sex fade, sex fades.

INTERVIEWER

The link between the two books seems to be a very Spanish, very baroque idea, *desengaño*, the moment when the scales of earthly illusion—friendship, the joys of the flesh—fall away and the protagonist sees both the abyss and salvation

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before him. Would you say you are part of the neobaroque movement that is so important in Spanish-American and particularly Cuban writing in our times?

CABRERA INFANTE

Certain writers, Borges and José Lezama Lima, have used a complex style it was convenient to call baroque. Other Cuban writers, Severo Sarduy and Alejo Carpentier, have both written about baroque and neobaroque and written in a baroque style. My themes may coincide with the baroque, but they are much more universal than you make them out to be. After all, the main theme of *La Habana* is not simply love but the pursuit of happiness across the empty space of loneliness. One of the more outrageous scenes is one a critic has called an "Ode to Masturbation." It isn't merely the sight of a human worm mating with his other end, but love in solitary confinement. This paean to onanism, with all due respect to Genet and Proust, takes place in a bathroom that is bare, small, and putrid. A cell or dungeon where the loving self conquers reclusion in the Devil's Island of the body and the mind that we call poverty.

INTERVIEWER

That last word might give the unsuspecting reader the impression that you write in a realist or naturalist style.

CABRERA INFANTE

That's a coy decoy. But after all, betrayal is the name of the game in *TTT*: betrayal of life through language and literature. The ultimate betrayal is in translation, of literature and of language, of life. So why not betray the reader's expectations as well?

INTERVIEWER

I just can't seem to dissociate these ideas from a baroque vision of the world.

CABRERA INFANTE

I'll go this far with you: *La Habana* is my own version of the Don Juan myth, beginning with the protagonist's

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complete innocence and ending in his complete guilt, which comes from his knowledge of the antagonist. Like my characters in *TTT,* these in *La Habana* are look-alikes, mirror images, ego and alter-ego. I've given the narrator many of my own traits. For example (remember, my mother brought me to a movie when I was twenty-nine *days* old), the narrator ends up in a movie, inside a big woman. Not in her womb, but down her vagina. The final phrase of the book—"Here's where we came in"—could mean that this is just one more movie or just one more woman. But only a few pages earlier, the now amniotic memoirist remembers that Virgilio Piñera told him a similar story as a dirty joke. It's curious that Virgilio, the Cuban poet, was a pederast, frightened by women, with a horror of the vagina. Curiouser and curiouser! I had published this ending years earlier (it was the first section of the book I wrote) with the title *Facilis Descensus Averni*, a line I stole from Virgil, also a pederast, who dreaded chasms and considered them to be the moral faults of Mother Earth. May we leave, on that note, the baroque barouche?

INTERVIEWER

Yessir. Perhaps you'd talk about your work-in-progress.

CABRERA INFANTE

It looks more like a work in re-gress to me. I confess with chagrin that I've been working on the same project since 1968 and even earlier. It's a long, long book called *Cuerpos divinos*, which for once you can translate into English without playing hide-and-seek with the reader, as *Divine Bodies*. This project, which by now seems too vast ever to be completed, has changed form many times, but it has not changed subject. Once more, as in *TTT* and in *La Habana*, it is Havana, this time the city and what happened to it between March 13, 1957 and a week in October, 1962.

INTERVIEWER

Why such precise dates?

CABRERA INFANTE

March 13, 1957 was the day the Presidential Palace, in

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the heart of Old Havana, was attacked by anti-Communist terrorists. It was a suicide mission carried out at three o'clock in the afternoon, doomed, as the terrorists knew, to failure. And yet, they almost killed Batista, they almost seized power in the capital, while Fidel Castro and his small band of guerrillas were a thousand miles away in Oriente Province. Had they won, Cuban history would have been totally different. And by implication, the present and future history of the Caribbean.

INTERVIEWER

And the second date?

CABRERA INFANTE

That's the time of the so-called Missile Crisis. Kennedy confirmed Castro's regime—for a second time: the first was in the Bay of Pigs fiasco, when he unwittingly made Castro legitimate. During the Missile Crisis he seemed to know what he was doing. After that, Castro became a totalitarian tyrant and that was the end of Cuba as a free country. That was also the end of Havana as a carefree city. And that's where my book ends.

INTERVIEWER

It sounds like the literary reconstruction of a historical period some critics denounced *TTT* for not being.

CABRERA INFANTE

It's just the opposite. The book evokes only Havana, specifically La Rampa, a street, not really a street, three blocks where El Vedado, which I call the Forbidden City, meets Havana. It's a street that goes down to the sea in a ramp-like incline. I write almost exclusively about that street that never sleeps—in my books that is.

INTERVIEWER

Is it like Damon Runyon's Broadway?

CABRERA INFANTE

It is, but where Damon Runyon had only parody and repartee, I have parody and paronomasia. The main character

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in my books, especially this one, is language. The prime task, the objective of my writing is to make the word an object. Not to convey thought, but to eliminate thought with words. Not sound, but words loose upon the world. In any case, *Cuerpos divinos* is not only anti-Runyon but anti-Thomas as well.

INTERVIEWER

Thomas who?

CABRERA INFANTE

Lord Thomas, Hugh Thomas—the British historian who has written the best history of Cuba to date. It's a pity he begins with the British seizure of Havana in 1762. But fortunately he ends his book in 1962, just as I do. *Cuerpos divinos* and Hugh Thomas's history show how the novel and history-writing converge and diverge. History is to politicians what posterity is to artists, and all politicians, Fidel Castro included, aspire to the condition of history. The difference is that the writer's posterity can be instant posterity, also known as success—a book that is read. But no politician would ever accept the idea that his posterity is a mere book called History.

INTERVIEWER

Surely you believe in immortality, a niche in that book called literary history?

CABRERA INFANTE

I don't believe in immortality, either of the body or of the written word, my corpus. Remember, when we talk about those immortal writers, like Homer, we are not talking about the writers but their writing. Dead men don't write. Dead writers don't last. Homer exists as a continuous process of rewriting called reading and translation.

INTERVIEWER

And *Cuerpos divinos* is about the difference between history for writers and politicians?

CABRERA INFANTE

It simply points out the difference between speech and

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speeches. By the way, *Cuerpos divinos* has become three books plus a settlement of accounts called *Separata*, in which three characters, one of them a mulatto midget, talk and talk and talk. Most of the writing is done by the midget, a peculiar sort of writer who has never written a line and who cannot because he cannot really speak.

INTERVIEWER

That's one paradox too many for me.

CABRERA INFANTE

The midget is very verbal and loquacious, even garrulous. But he, as one of my characters in *TTT* remarks, tries to turn Spanish into a dead language. He speaks in English, and because his English is not very good, he keeps on making puns and jokes. He is condemned, not to silence but to speaking gibberish. That is the language of Babel, which is what Havana once was, Babelonia, where we spoke in tongues.

INTERVIEWER

Why haven't you finished it?

CABRERA INFANTE

My life keeps getting in the way. I started it in 1968, as I said, but in 1969, I had to stop to write a screenplay, entitled *Vanishing Point*. So I went to Hollywood in 1970. In Hollywood, under orders from Richard Zanuck (the man who was *Jaws*), I wrote a screenplay based on a dime spy novel called *The Salzburg Connection* that was never made into a film. (The title was, though, under another name, with another plot.) But I earned more money than I had ever seen in my life. In 1971, I went back to the book, but because *Vanishing Point* was such a success Joseph Losey engaged me to write a screenplay of Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano*. I ended up in the loony bin, a.k.a. a *bedlam* in London. From there, under the power of eighteen electroshocks that practically eradicated what I use most to write (except for my typewriter)—I mean my memory—I went into clinical

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depression, an insidious illness that has lasted for years. It still lasts—so I must take life with a pinch of lithium salt. In the meantime, subsidized by my points (i.e. shares) in *Vanishing Point*, I managed to complete, rewrite, or compose a few books. And then I went back to *Cuerpos divinos*, which I again interrupted to write *La Habana para un infante difunto*. I thought it would take only a few months, but it took me three years and two different versions.

INTERVIEWER

Do you really mean that writing the screenplay for *Under the Volcano* drove you mad?

CABRERA INFANTE

Let's say it was the final stage of a process. I was writing (this was 1971) *Cuerpos divinos* when my agent at the time (he must remain anonymous because he's a powerful Hollywood producer now) casually asked me if I knew of a book called *Volcano*. I said I had heard of it when it was still called *Under the Volcano*. "So you know the book?" "Sure." I lied because at the time I still hadn't read the book. He then advised me to get on a plane and go to Rome to talk to Joe Losey. "He needs a fresh script." I was about to leave for Rome when my agent gave me one last piece of advice: "Take the book with you, willya?" I took his advice and the book and read it on the plane. I was so enthralled, so taken by it, so much into the character of Consul Firmin, that we went mad together. This didn't happen in the plane but back in London, while I wrote the script—a word I have tended to pronounce ever since as this "creep." If I feel suicidal, I call it simply this "crypt."

INTERVIEWER

Douglas Day, Lowry's biographer, says your script is superior to the novel.

CABRERA INFANTE

Douglas Day is kind to me and unkind to Malcolm Lowry. *Under the Volcano* is one of the truly tragic novels of this

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century and at moments it may be compared to the best tragic writing of Tolstoy or Dickens. For my money, Lowry's novel belongs in the same class with a few of Faulkner's books and with *The Death of Virgil*. Lowry has an advantage over both Faulkner and Broch in that he is easier to read. It's a pity Losey couldn't make the picture because he is that rare bird, a film director who is cultured and, more important, intelligent.

INTERVIEWER

We've talked a good deal now about your writing and your fascination with spoken language, especially that of Havana, and with the act of writing, the continuous flow you spin into books. Embedded in your talk about talking there are two other kinds of discourse: images (including pictures and movies) and sound (especially popular music). Could we talk about your life now in terms of those other aspects?

CABRERA INFANTE

The three are inseparable, but let's try to emphasize images and music this time. As I said earlier, my mother brought me to the movies when I was twenty-nine days old. As a child I watched anything and everything that moved. And even things that didn't move—the funnies. Incidentally, it was the comic strips that bridged the gap between pictures and words for me because I learned to read by deciphering the words in the little balloons.

INTERVIEWER

What could you have seen in your Cuban hometown?

CABRERA INFANTE

I saw serials with Ken Maynard, Johnny MacBrown, and my favorite cowboy star, Buck Jones. I wept when he died in the Coconut Grove fire in 1941. According to legend, he died trying to save a chorine. According to the press he burned because he was too drunk to move. Like John Ford in the movie *The Man Who Killed Liberty Valance*, my memory printed only the legend. I even remember Kermit Maynard,

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Ken's brother. You name me any 1930s movie, serial, short, or cartoon and I'll tell you all about it. In Gibara, my hometown, my uncle was the projectionist, so I got in free. In Havana, where we moved in 1941, there were other possibilities. All of that is in *TTT* and *La Habana*.

INTERVIEWER

Were the close-up kisses the source of your erotic impulses?

CABRERA INFANTE

The only kind of movie I wasn't keen on were love movies. Kissing time was yawning time for me. I still don't care much for romantic movies. Give me a *motion* picture and you give me emotion.

INTERVIEWER

Did you listen to radio serials?

CABRERA INFANTE

We were too poor to own a radio until well into the forties, but I would listen to the neighbors', both in Gibara and Havana. With the exception of "Tarzan," all my favorite programs were Cuban, even "The Spirit," and "Raffles," which borrowed freely from the comic strips and the novel of the same title. But those were in the forties. In the late thirties, my favorite programs were "The Red Serpent," with a Chinese detective, and "The Mad Monk," a take-off on "The Shadow," not on Monk Lewis.

INTERVIEWER

So the radio provided another link, words: spoken words, sound effects, and, of course, music.

CABRERA INFANTE

I was a real radio ham. Some of my parodies of radio programs reappear in *TTT*. And it was radio that led me to love classical music, because Cuban programs could use commercial recordings as background music without paying for them. My early passions were both visual and aural, in the form of movies and comic strips or radio serials and popular music.

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INTERVIEWER

That popular music is simultaneously a kind of background to your novels and a code to which your characters allude.

CABRERA INFANTE

Especially the narrative music, the *son* (beat) and the *bolero*, which is a Cuban song with a faint rhythm base. I still remember those old songs that talked about the *marimba*, the musical instrument, as wood blocks that could sing with the voice of a woman. Or even better, a *bolero* in praise of some dark lady's eyes in whose shadows you could see palm trees drunk with the wine of sunshine. Good grief! The only reason I didn't become a composer is that I can't carry a tune.

INTERVIEWER

Did you ever do any drawing?

CABRERA INFANTE

When I was about ten, I would draw all the planes that appeared in the "Smilin' Jack" strip and I still remember a particularly elaborate hydroplane that earned me praise from my granduncle. I was fairly good at drawing and as an adolescent in Havana I thought I might become some kind of Cuban painter. That illusion turned to disillusion (*engaño* vs. *desengaño*) when my younger brother, who was only twelve at the time, showed me who was going to be the painter in the family.

INTERVIEWER

Was it then, when you were a teenager, that you began to write?

CABRERA INFANTE

I did write a radio play at that time and even taped it on a very cheap, primitive wire recorder. It was modelled on "The Spirit," the American comic strip, not the radio serial. A homage to Will Eisner, it wasn't all that bad. As a matter of fact, I became an amateur radio actor for a while, playing on a Sunday radio program sponsored by a Catholic association. I wrote some of the plays myself: they were all

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saints' lives. I took the parts of Arabs, Orientals, and heretics and took my acting style not from Peter Lorre, as you might have thought, but from Jesús Alvariño, a great Cuban radio personality who played Tamakún, a prince who was an Oriental adventurer and an amateur detective. Alvariño became chief of programming for Cuba's biggest radio station, and it was to him I delivered my first "professional" writing, a pilot for a radio program based on the Sherlock Holmes story "The Speckled Band." He rejected it flat and saved me from becoming a radio scriptwriter.

INTERVIEWER

Did you only write screenplays later, as an adult?

CABRERA INFANTE

When I was about twenty, around 1949, I wrote a story in the form of a screenplay. It was based on the folklore of my Oriental hometown, Gibara, and it was even published. The title, oddly enough, was "The Howling." A horror piece, naturally.

INTERVIEWER

What was your first real screenplay?

CABRERA INFANTE

The one I wrote in London in the summer of 1966. It was never shot. I wrote it in English, but the title was *El Máximo*. Over the past few years there has been a vogue for novels on South American tyrants among my Spanish-American colleagues, but most of those books turn out to be trite versions of the Spaniard Ramón del Valle Inclán's brilliant *Tirano Banderas* (1926). I wrote this script about a Caribbean dictator who flees to Ibiza (as Batista fled to Madeira) and there reproduces his presidential palace, complete with bodyguards, honor guards, and receptions attended only by scruffy islanders. I based the story on the life of the late Trujillo, the bloody ridiculous dictator of the Dominican Republic, but my title contained an oblique reference to a still active Cuban bleeding tyrant. The producer got cold feet, of course. I would like to rewrite that script someday because

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it was funny, but perhaps not funny enough. It had too many paper gags—jokes that work well on paper but fall flat on the screen. When I started writing screenplays, I had to learn that no matter how good your dialogue *looks* on the page, it sounds different when spoken by actors. It seems unreal because of course it is. Dialogue in fiction is always written to be read in silence. The page is the limit. Dialogue on stage and on the screen is meant to be spoken. The voice is the limit. Dickens discovered this when he started reading his books in front of audiences.

INTERVIEWER

Could you tell some more about that 1970 trip to Hollywood?

CABRERA INFANTE

In Hollywood I felt like a visitor from outer space. When I checked into the Chateau Marmont Hotel, I called my agent. Before I could recite my full name, his secretary asked me if I were Hungarian. First I said no, but when I thought about how many Hungarians had triumphed in Hollywood—Michael Curtiz, Peter Lorre, Bela Lugosi—I said I was from Buda but no pest. The secretary just giggled. That was my welcome to Hollywood. What I did mostly was to explore Raymond Chandler's territory. You know, I hope, that one of the models for *TTT* is *The Long Goodbye.*

INTERVIEWER

Did you have any experiences there like those we associate with Fitzgerald or Faulkner, those high-pressure story conferences?

CABRERA INFANTE

I never attended a story conference. The Chandler, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner days were long gone when I arrived. Mine was truly a pleasant stay—all expenses paid. The only thing like a story conference that happened to me took place when I met Richard Zanuck. He asked me what the title *Vanishing Point* meant, and I told him all about linear perspective and the end of a man as a convergence of life

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lines. He thanked me and that was that. The only suggestion came from Big Boss Darryl Zanuck himself. I was flattered and surprised that the eighty-year-old man would even bother to read the script. I wrote in what he suggested, a small, connective scene, but my director never shot it. At the end of that year, the old man kicked his son out of the studio and came back. In Hollywood, old pros die with their kicking boots on.

INTERVIEWER

Was your director axed by Zanuck the elder?

CABRERA INFANTE

He succumbed to his own lack of talent.

INTERVIEWER

Is the translation of your script into visual images in *Vanishing Point* the same sort of displacement you describe in noting the difference between written and spoken dialogue?

CABRERA INFANTE

What the spectator sees on the screen is the mirror image of my screenplay. *Vanishing Point* is my script as seen on the white mirror of the screen, in De Luxe color, at an aspect ratio of 1:85, running at twenty-four frames per second, in Stereo Sound—much more than I ever wrote or could write. That's a movie. I just wrote the screenplay. Thanks to John Alonzo, a cinematographer of genius, my screenplay is now a piece of Americana, a cult film, and a very successful movie. I *wrote* a motion picture about a man with a problem in a car. My director made a movie about a man in a car with problems. Cars in the film are actors and the movie may be taken as a paean to cars or to death by car. By the way, I don't drive.

INTERVIEWER

Would you ever do another screenplay?

CABRERA INFANTE

Sure. Not for the glory but certainly for the money. I'd

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like to do Conrad's *Nostromo* because it's the best of Conrad's novels and because I'm in the perfect position to make a good script of it. I even talk English with a Polish accent.

INTERVIEWER

What about film reviews? After your brilliant reviews in *Un oficio del siglo xx* and the equally stunning essays on Welles, Huston, Hitchcock, Minelli, Ford, and Hawks in *Arcadia todas las noches* (1978), it seems a shame that you would give up film criticism.

CABRERA INFANTE

Flattery will lead this interview nowhere, you know. Early in 1960, I realized I couldn't go on reviewing films in Havana because the Eastern-Block films they were showing were beyond criticism. In fact they were beneath contempt even. So when *Carteles,* the magazine where I had started writing film reviews was closed down (in June of that year), I decided my time was up. Besides, I was beginning to burn out as a reviewer. I was no longer capable of going to the movies just for fun because I had to be a critic all the time.

INTERVIEWER

You felt you were intellectualizing too much?

CABRERA INFANTE

Are you kidding? I just got tired of being a critic. But I understand what you mean because I have always been a staunch defender of Hollywood against charges of commercialism and vulgarity. Hollywood is commercial and vulgar—and a purveyor of popular entertainment. And I refuse to make distinctions betwen high and low culture, between art and pop art. Movies are for people to enjoy. Films, to make a distinction, are for snobs and pretentious critics. I don't like films: you can have Godard, Antonioni, Bergman, Bertolucci, and all the German *auteurs*. Give me the directors I wrote about in *Arcadia todas las noches*, and if you can't, give me Spielberg, De Palma, Romero, or Scorsese—even Blake Edwards now.

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INTERVIEWER

What? Do you actually like Julie Andrews as a sex symbol?

CABRERA INFANTE

She's as appetizing as a eunuch in drag, but I like the comedies her husband has been turning out. Well, perhaps not *Victor/Victoria* so much, but *SOB* is such a ruthless comedy about Hollywood that if Blake Edwards were to make one about Washington, Bob Hope would be playing the White House—and not as a stand-up comedian.

INTERVIEWER

I'd like to return to literature if I may. Ever since Borges shared the Formentor Prize with Beckett in 1961, Latin American literature has been the dominant force in the Spanish speaking world. Do you feel you owe anything to your Latin American elders?

CABRERA INFANTE

First let me say that I despise the term "Latin America." Better call us Mongrelia. We are mongrels, a messy mix of white, black, and Indian. Second, aside from the elements I absorbed from the culture I grew up in I owe nothing to those "elders" you mention, especially if they wrote in Spanish.

INTERVIEWER

What are you talking about?

CABRERA INFANTE

Well, Borges, an elder I admire, writes in Borgese, a private dialect composed of quaint and formal English that condescends to employ Spanish words with Anglo-Saxon syntax. I owe him a lot, but I owe nothing to his Spanish.

INTERVIEWER

Do you owe your—I hate to say it—Latin American contemporaries anything?

CABRERA INFANTE

Not even money. For me there's Borges and the rest. They

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are the rest, a silent majority for me because I can't hear a word they're writing.

INTERVIEWER

But you are a part of the Boom of the Latin American novel of the sixties!

CABRERA INFANTE

Like hell! They were only a sonic boom, a wake. But since you press me, I confess I have a debt with Carlos Fuentes.

INTERVIEWER

What is it? A theme—Fuentes's interest in film?

CABRERA INFANTE

I met Carlos in Mexico City in 1959. He entered my field of vision waving a hand and smiling as he crossed a screening room. It happened at Producciones Barbachano Ponce. I was there with Manuel Barbachano and Luis Buñuel, whose only claim to fame then was *Los olvidados* (an utterly forgettable film). We were watching rushes of Buñuel's latest picture, *Nazarin*, which he made for Barbachano. Watching your rushes in private can be very boring so we were keeping Buñuel company. Suddenly the door opened and in came Carlos with a small metallic object in his hand. I thought it was a derringer, but he rubbed his face with it! His smile turned into a grimace as he stretched the skin on his jowl and rolled up his eyes. Carlos was much more entertaining than *Nazarin*. Actually, he was shaving. I had never seen a cordless razor before and I couldn't wait to buy one. Back in Cuba, I used it thinking, "If Carlos could only see me now." That's my debt to Carlos Fuentes.

INTERVIEWER

That's your debt?

CABRERA INFANTE

That's it. But it's a lot more than my debt to Cortázar, who didn't have to shave at all when I met him. Vargas Llosa wore sideburns in those days and shaved with a cut-throat razor. And García Márquez had a mustache when I met him

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in Havana back in 1961. I met Donoso, the only true gentleman of the bunch, in London in 1970. Too late for the two of us. You see, he had the longest beard I ever saw, and I wore a goatee. Barababoom!

INTERVIEWER

Don't you think you're being a little bitchy?

CABRERA INFANTE

Yes, because I don't want to get lost in the crowd. We all write on our own, and I want to be read on my own. Feeling better now?

INTERVIEWER

I think we've exhausted that topic. Perhaps exile might be our last subject. Here in the United States we've seen a tidal wave of Cuban exiles pour onto our shores in recent years. How did you leave Cuba?

CABRERA INFANTE

By plane. I was a lucky exile, unlike those who left on the Freedom Flotilla. I left on a *Cubana* flight with my two daughters (by my first marriage), a Raymond Chandler novel, and little else. The tickets came compliments of the Cuban government. The man who is now number three in the regime, who had known me since I was a boy and who fancies himself a literary critic, figured it would be better all around if I left in good standing. He probably thought the rigors of capitalism or the cold climate would drive me home.

INTERVIEWER

Were you sad to leave Cuba and Havana for good?

CABRERA INFANTE

I left that pitiful place feeling pity. Actually I was grinning like Paul Muni when he escaped from the chain gang.

INTERVIEWER

Your writing is full of nostalgia. *TTT* even has an epigraph, taken from *Alice in Wonderland* about imagining the light of a candle after the candle is blown out. Don't you ever feel homesick?

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CABRERA INFANTE

Show me a man who longs for jail and I'll show you a warden on his day off, spent at the zoo, of course. I had become, to use the regime's metaphor, a *gusano*, a worm. That was Fidel Castro's invention, although Goebbels really had the copyright when he referred, in 1933, to Jews as *Ungeziefer* (vermin). I was no Gregor Samsa; I was leaving Kafkaland behind, so I took my metamorphosis in stride.

INTERVIEWER

Thinking now about the total phenomenon of Cuban exile, how do you understand the Mariel phenomenon?

CABRERA INFANTE

An event without precedent in the history of diplomacy. In less than seventy-two hours eleven thousand people took refuge in the Peruvian embassy in Havana. Mariel took place so that Fidel Castro could cover up his own blunder, his having removed the Cuban guards from around the Peruvian embassy.

INTERVIEWER

So it was a *coup de théâtre?*

CABRERA INFANTE

Yes, with the greatest producer making everyone play his part. Some, like the novelist Reinaldo Arenas, were expelled because they were known homosexuals—there are no gays allowed in clean-cut Communist Cuba—but others had to swear they were pederasts, prostitutes, or parasites to be let out.

INTERVIEWER

Are you friendly with these recent exiles, like Arenas?

CABRERA INFANTE

I have the most cordial relationship with several. Carlos Franqui, the former editor of *Revolución*, is an old friend. He showed me I could be a writer. Reinaldo Arenas is a new friend who shares my passion for writing. Heberto Padilla I've known for many years and is another good friend.

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INTERVIEWER

Padilla is a rather special case in the history of Latin American and Cuban literature.

CABRERA INFANTE

Around 1970, Padilla said a lot of ugly things about me and others in print, so I retorted. He had written them under pressure from the Cuban police, who viewed him with distrust. Later he was jailed, tortured, and forced to make a public confession, now famous, in which he denounced a few friends in Cuba and abroad, me included. He also confessed some minor literary crimes—like writing a couple of mildly critical poems the Security Police deemed subversive—and abominated himself and his wife Belkis, also a poet. Fascist states like Cuba just don't like dissidents, real and potential. Padilla was about to become a historical enemy. Homosexuals, it seems, are natural dissidents, strangers in a Communist paradise.

INTERVIEWER

Would you say that you all constitute a Cuban "Lost Generation"?

CABRERA INFANTE

I don't think even the Lost Generation was a real generation. They were never lost, only drunk. All I can talk about is the writers, painters, and musicians who gathered around *Lunes*, the Monday literary supplement to the newspaper *Revolución*, a cultural wonder created by Carlos Franqui that became the most popular and powerful paper in Cuban history.

INTERVIEWER

Was *Lunes* as successful?

CABRERA INFANTE

We were a knockout, in more senses than one. Imagine a literary weekly that prints a quarter of a million copies, in a country in revolution, distributed along with the official newspaper. There were some really talented people working

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on *Lunes*: Virgilio Piñera, then almost sixty, was the oldest and Severo Sarduy, at twenty, was the youngest. In between there were Oscar Hurtado (his last name means "stolen" and he was a bit of a plagiarist), Walterio Carbonell, a Paris-educated, black Marxist ideologue, José Baragano, a surrealist poet (deceased), Padilla, Pablo Armando Fernández, who returned from New York to take part in *Lunes*, as had Padilla. There was Raúl Martínez, an abstract painter who did our covers and layout, Natalio Galán, a composer and music critic who now lives in New Orleans. Calvert Casey, who learned his art of literary economy from Virgilio Piñera. Antón Arrufat, today back in precarious favor after being persecuted with Padilla. José Triana, the dramatist, who now lives in Paris. What a cast! But we chose the wrong production, of course. Mind you, *Revolución* gave me my only chance to be a war correspondent.

INTERVIEWER

When was that?

CABRERA INFANTE

At what you call the Bay of Pigs and what the Cubans call Playa Girón.

INTERVIEWER

Would you care to talk about it?

CABRERA INFANTE

Why not? On the night of April 18, 1961, I went down to the editorial offices of *Revolución* to volunteer to be a war correspondent and pick up my ID card. I didn't have to go, but I was curious and held the mistaken belief that war is good for writers. It was an adventure. Anyway, Carlos Franqui had a problem: too many war correspondents and only one war. He even had foreign correspondents. While I was there, I also found out about the international situation. One of the Prensa Latina people was down there and we asked him how things were going on the international front. He said everything was shipshape except for a spot of trouble in New York. It seemed the fellow in charge of the agency in Manhattan had left town in such a hurry that he hadn't

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even bothered to lock the office door. We asked him who that was. "Oh nobody, just a Columbian journalist, of no importance, named García Márquez."

INTERVIEWER

You're joking.

CABRERA INFANTE

No. Anyway, I left and headed for the front at about three o'clock in the morning, driving my Austin-Metropolitan convertible. The Bahía de Cochinos goes inland (as bays will) to form the Cienaga de Zapata—Zapata Swamps (not named for Marlon Brando's look-alike), and you reach it by driving east along the Central Highway across Havana and through Matanzas Province, looking for the Jaguey Grande road that you hit at the end of the province, where Matanzas meets Las Villas Province and the swamps. President Kennedy chose the landing spot, apparently for humanitarian reasons. The original site on Eisenhower's landing plans was near Trinidad, a small colonial city decaying in isolation at the foot of the Escambray Mountains, where there had been peasant uprisings against Castro since 1960. The landing place was a strip of sand between the swamp and the Caribbean.

INTERVIEWER

You drove out there alone?

CABRERA INFANTE

No. Walterio Carbonell, the brilliant Cuban Marxist who was a lawyer and once the leader of the Young Communist League, was with me. Carbonell was expelled from the Party in 1953 after he sent a telegram to Fidel Castro, a friend from university days, but then in Batista's prison. The telegram simply congratulated Castro for surviving the Moncada Barracks attack, but Carbonell sent it right to the jail and signed it. The Party was terrified Batista might link them to the plot, so out he went. Fausto Canel, a young film director and *Revolución*'s movie critic, and a very young writer and TV critic (also my former brother-in-law) named Luis Aguero were also in the car.

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INTERVIEWER

The Austin sounds more like a Greyhound.

CABRERA INFANTE

Well, we were all underdeveloped. At dawn, still on Central Highway, we were detained for more than an hour by traffic—not all of it war correspondents. There were hundreds of trucks, tanks, jeeps, even motorcycles jamming the narrow highway. I remember thinking that a single enemy plane could have blown the convoy sky high—and us along with it! Fortunately the inefficiency of our army was matched by an absolute lack of contingency-planning by the enemy: Cubans at war. We skirted around Treasure Pond and headed for Jaguey, which looked like a border town in the Old West, with people peering through half-closed windows at war as if it were a showdown. At the end of the town the road was blocked by two jeeps and four soldiers. Only when I waved my ID card—which Franqui had concocted the night before with the printers—did they let us pass. There was no more traffic, only a solitary, very forbidding road to war. We all looked back. To go on might mean death, but to go back would mean a loss of face. We chose war. Near the coast we met a group of very young soldiers, mere children, jumping up and down and shouting "Dia-lang! Dia-lang!" They weren't Cuban Viet Cong, but uncouth youths trying to say "Díaz Lanz." They thought they had caught Díaz Lanz, the former head of Castro's airforce, who was (and is) a defector in the U.S. But Díaz Lanz never came. They had found a U.S. Army camouflage parachute, whose former owner was probably drowned in the swamp or devoured by the infamous alligators of Zapata. We went on to the beach, Playa Larga, where the first landing took place. It looked like a Bacardi commercial: there was nothing on the beach except what God created and the tracks where the enemy had placed their heavy artillery. There was not a single weapon to be seen.

INTERVIEWER

You mean they took everything back off?

CABRERA INFANTE

There were no bodies, no blood, no empty shells, no

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weapons of any kind. Maybe they practiced retreating too much and advancing too little. The only enemy we could see was about four miles offshore—several American warships. They looked like big gray rocks made of solid lead. Reversing the shot, I tried to imagine what they might see through their binoculars: four tiny civilians (the tallest only five-feet-seven) standing around a tiny British sportscar painted white, parked on the very spot where their invading surrogates had been such a short time before. We must have been a bizarre or sorry sight! I was the only one dressed in something vaguely military: my *milicia* uniform—olive-green trousers, blue *mesclilla* shirt and black beret and boots. Fausto had on a short-sleeved shirt and slacks, as did Aguero. Walterio Carbonell was wearing a pinstriped black double-breasted 100% wool suit he bought at Aquascutum in London. He did take off his vest and dress shirt and replaced them with a yellow Lacoste—a concession to the climate. Then, problems John Wayne never had—my car wouldn't start. But an army jeep came by and in it was an old friend of mine from journalism school, Angel Guerra, a good name (Angel of War) for a very martial-looking lieutenant. He offered us a lift to war, just like that.

INTERVIEWER

Was there really a front? Were you far from it?

CABRERA INFANTE

Not very far, but what mattered was fear: fear of not getting to the war and fear of getting too much into it. On the side of the road there were two cows grazing peacibly, as we sped by on a two-lane blacktop highway recently built for tourists. Then we stopped near a house and a dark, heavy man in fatigues, sweating and dirty, came up to us gesturing and shouting like mad: "Are you in command here?" He was talking to me. All I could reply was, "Come on man, I come from Havana." Then Angel jumped out of the jeep and calmed the hysterical sergeant down. The sergeant went back into the din and confusion and I got scared. Bombs started falling and I ran for cover in the shack by the road. All hell broke loose and I found I was blasted *down* (I know it sounds

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illogical) to the floor. There I was "biting the dust"—the house had a dirt floor. Punishment came from above, a clap of thunder and a pair of boots.

INTERVIEWER

What boots?

CABRERA INFANTE

A pair of boots with feet in them, all connected to legs and the whole thing pressing against my head and shoulders. I looked up and saw who it was: a young black soldier trying to dig a foxhole with his bare hands and fear for a spade. I decided it was better to be killed by a bullet than let this young Othello make me into an urbane Turk and smite me thus, strangling me like an uncircumcised dog of war. I went out and found Angel calmly smoking. He told me never to go into a house during a bombing raid because pilots always attack what they can see—houses for example. I headed for a sheltering tree where I found César Leante, another minute man from *Revolución*. I asked him how far we were from the front and he told me we were at the front. I was suddenly Fabrizio del Dongo at Waterloo without knowing it. Fausto joined us and I woke up Luis Aguero, who was having a rather improbable nap, to tell him we were pulling out. Suddenly they were shelling our rear! We found out that the shelling was the product of Núñez Jiménez: he was a geographer Castro had made head of the Agrarian Reform Office. He was a nature lover now turned into an artillery officer. He wasn't so hot with a howitzer, because the shells were landing *away* from the beach—and *on* our way out. We were confused—so was everyone else—but we jumped on a truck leaving the war zone. We reached the newspaper late that night and found that the war was over.

INTERVIEWER

What about the others?

CABRERA INFANTE

There was a major crackdown after the Bay of Pigs. A documentary, *P.M.*, shot by my brother Sabá, was seized and

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banned by the Censorship Board. *Lunes* protested and was suppressed. Then Franqui was made to take a trip to Europe and was later fired as editor of *Revolución*. I was sent as cultural attaché to Belgium. Carbonell was named ambassador to Tunisia and got in trouble when he accidentally ran down a Tunisian Jew. He happened to be with a buxom blond French girl at the time and the Cuban Communists turned the event into a scandal. He was recalled and came home to write a brilliant, truly Marxist essay that demonstrated that Cuban literature had a slave culture for background. For this he ran afoul of the Stalinist literary commissars. Then he got into even more trouble by explaining to a delegation of French writers invited by the Cuban government that there was no freedom of speech in Cuba and telling all about *P.M.* and *Lunes*. He was called to the Writers' Union to recant, but delivered a scathing speech instead. He was expelled from the union, of course, lost his job and made destitute. Then he tried to form a Black Power movement in Cuba: that got him four years at hard labor.

INTERVIEWER

And the others?

CABRERA INFANTE

Fausto married a French girl, left Cuba, and is now a (divorced) Frenchman, working in Spain as a film director. Luis Aguero tried to leave through the Writers' Union, but ended up in the slammer for two years. César Leante became a socialist success. He was Cuba's cultural attaché in Paris, then a successful novelist in Havana, and later a high official in the Ministry of Culture. In 1981, he was sent to East Berlin. The plane stopped in Madrid and César asked the security man aboard permission to stretch his legs. Permission granted. He stretched them all the way to immigration to ask for asylum!

INTERVIEWER

No other happy endings?

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CABRERA INFANTE

Well, when I got back home that night, I expected a hero's welcome from my consort Miriam Gómez. All she did was banish me to the bath to remove all the soot that had turned me into a kind of Cuban Al Jolson. Then we went to bed.

INTERVIEWER

Now, after you left Cuba, when you lived in Spain and later in London, how did you live?

CABRERA INFANTE

As I've always lived: by my wits, which is the lowest form of wit and not, as Addison says, the pun. I was not permitted to work—either for pay or for free—at all when I first got to England. But a clever lawyer told me that writing was not working. I agreed then and I still do. He meant that I could concoct stories, articles, screenplays—whatever—and that these would constitute a product I would manufacture and sell.

INTERVIEWER

Surely you were shocked at the idea of not being allowed to earn a living.

CABRERA INFANTE

Not really. You see, I've always had friends. I merely lived on the charity of my closest ones. Two Cuban writers in exile, Juan Arcocha and Calvert Casey (who later killed himself in Rome) lent me money through my French publisher at that time, Gallimard, to create for the Home Office the illusion I was receiving income from abroad. Later I wrote for *Mundo Nuevo*, the most important Spanish language literary magazine of the late sixties, which was then edited by Emir Rodríguez Monegal (who now teaches at Yale) in Paris. He is a dear friend. I entered the jungle of exile when I was barely thirty-six and officially left it at fifty, when I became a subject of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Now, I'm the only English writer who writes in Spanish.

—**Alfred Mac Adam**

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Two Poems by Stanislaw Barańczak

translated by Valeria Wasilewski

What is a Verse Not to Be Thought

What is a verse not to be thought
in the oval rows of the stadium, where
crowded
(shoulder to shoulder)
we stifle
by a victory cry our common daily fear;

what is a verse not to be composed
in the overzealous rhythm of a march, which goose
stepping
(leg to leg)
shreds
into pieces every thought that does not conform;

what is a verse not to be pronounced
in the oscillating roars from the TV, where
we kill
(arm to arm)
each night
like an embryo growing too quickly under our hearts;

what is a verse not to be placed
in the open rupture of the morning paper,
repeating
(word for word)
everyday
the same hemorrhaging dawn in the middle of the night;

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what is this kind of verse, in other words:
what is a vice not to be repented,

becomes a value not to be refuted,
becomes a virtue not to be rejected,
becomes a vision not to be relinquished.

This is Not a Conversation for the Telephone

Well let's assume it's yes, but this is not a conversation
for the telephone, you know, our ears
have vigilant listeners, so let's just prepare it in
a language foreign to them and us, and don't say "yes"
before you translate it;

well let's admit it's yes, but this is not
convenient for the moment, you know, our
walls have sensitive ears, so let's just preserve it
for later, keep it and don't say
"yes" before you wait it out;

well let's agree it's yes, but this is not
a condition forever, you know,
our souls have thin walls, so let's just presume
it for today, for awhile, and don't
say "yes" before you delete it;

well it must be no, but this
is not a conclusion for real,
you know, our listeners have sensitive souls, so let's
pretend for now that we protest, and
don't say "no" before you apologize.

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An Origin of A-R-T

Winsome Bob meets Katherine & drops Nancy.
Nancy burrows even deeper
into her studies of semiology, at Yale.
Bob, following his penis
after languid years of domestic affection,
goes to Ann Arbor to join Katherine,
who fitfully jabs at her doctorate
concerning the History of Art.

Bob takes up Arts Administration at U. Michigan,
picturing a foothold
into the world of money & aesthetics
for Katherine & himself.
Meanwhile Nancy drops her studies (at Yale)
& flees to the opposite coast, to read.

As is often the case between money & aesthetics, matters
between Katherine & Bob
grow extremely problematic & accusative.
Bob, about to hit 30 & tired of life
not seeming as lyrical as it is rumored to be,
dashes off a whining epistle to Nancy,
to her sad end of the continent,
to which he scampers

after discussing things with Katherine
hedging his bet by leading Katherine to imagine
that he may someday return to Ann Arbor,
their Arts Dream still intact, & he ready to move
on it, possessed then by an unusual clarity of mind
and a thoroughly winnowed-out sense of purpose.

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Nancy, by now, has been
in Los Angeles for 7 months,
recovering her love for the great books
and the solitude out of which great love
has always grown.
"No fire" is all she has for Bob
after the attempted reconciliation,
the shore lapping at their feet & so on...

Calling Katherine in Ann Arbor Bob discovers Katherine
wants no more of the lad,
that she has met a Transportation Consultant
in whom she is vaguely interested.
Bob, losing all aplomb
& sensing the criminal in himself for the first time,
accepts a hefty fellowship
from the University of Massachusetts

where he vows to recount this tale
in all its brutal animation, honing in
on how static it all seemed as a narrative event
but how many moves, how many telling details,
how much inordinate sorrow
it actually involved.

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Blessed are the Clouds

Nights—the long interims—when for a time
one's mind is stifled in the stardust-storm...

Yet day does come—again all's well—
suddenly a half-hidden tower
is warming the whole square
with the Doge-crimson velvet of its bells

I can feel each cloud as a thing
and seem to touch its turrets and to think
the great curve of its birth
and find then I am thanking
watershepherdess Earth

Some nights, too, there are clouds silvered by Death
sailing laden with star-oblivion

or hurled clouds have lost form
and brought mercy muffling all the stars from us

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Over Land and Sea

Alone now with the loyal noise of the train,
the voice of loss—familiar—withinbrain:
in back of light, night—anew the undoing
evening in us ending a day of dying

To be on new ground is to be at sea—
wake walking on the give of waters, free
to see
and yet seek
in despair defiant
confront the findings

Laundering Song

The river ripples in the sun
women and men come and are gone

ripples scarabs with one gold horn
stabs is beheaded seems reborn

women and men coming again
or in the place another one

into the sun come and are gone
ripples scarabs with one gold horn

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The Thirst of Turtles

How parched, how marrow-dust dry
they must get on their long surface and undersea
journeys—huge stuffed husks,
imperturbable swimmers grazing
jellyfish abutting the bruised
waters' pasture. How thirsty
a sixty day swim, how graceful
the winching back to one unforgotten
shore. *Plub*, *plub*, sleepless
the hull's inner workings, their tails
motorless rudderings; deep,
deep their thirst and need. One hundred,
one hundred and twenty: how long they live
in their thirst, propelling
the great bloody steaks of their bodies,
dreaming, anticipating alert
single-purposed oblivions: sweet
sweet turtle-sex—which excites
the lonely watches of sailors—sometimes days
joined in wave-riding rapture on the surface
of the depths. And still more thirsty
afterwards, how alone later—currents
having taken—righted, relentless,
back on course, collision, with centuries,
with a shore; solitary, speechless,
utterly buoyant, as unethereal
as cabbage.... How thirsty these
both wise and clumsy, like us, feeding
in ever widening or diminishing
circles, outward and inward, dropping
great oily tears, killing themselves
to beat a big hole in dirt,
burying something, then retreating
heavily on their own tracks, like rails,
reaching forward to the sea.

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Sleepmask Dithyrambic

You must remove your sleepmask, haul it
from your eyes, sleep a white sleep without
slapping floodwaters—let it go,
let its thumbscrews loosen, let it unwind
like bandages (lily-flavored flesh
beneath, pearl-colored the pale
caused by)—lower it: sightseer
in oblivion, all the dumb
joy of death's languorous leaning
over happy tombstones—send it downstream
on sweet pontoons, give it back
to the blanks, fold it like two soft cleavers—
what once ripped your pillow
like shrapnel flesh—what was sleeping
with coal on your eyelids, what's worn
threadbare by black wheels in your forehead,
what deepest blue abided by—let it down—
what screeches like icepick to ice,
black and padded: Sleepmask the Teacher,
Sleepmask the Round Sky, Sleepmask
Fracture bearing its elastic
into the back of your head, sleepmask black
as pines doused in starlessness—get rid
of it—yours, your spider's
and his spare, your wife's mink one,
your dog's, the miniatures strung like popcorn,
all of them black like the cinders
of flags, blanker than lies, the low
shiver of dog-spume lies, sleepmask that sends
your eyes twirling like apples
in a ripsaw wind: sleepmask glued,

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stapled, painted on, pinned,
licked clean and monogrammed,
sleepmask surgically implanted, sleepmask
congenital, swaddling clothes and bib—
refuse it, remove it—sleepmask an island
over-run with rats and cheese: the formal,
feral, dipped in doom—drop it, tear
it off, lower it like the lid of a coffin
filled with enemy: sleepmask.

Somebody's Aunt Out Swabbing Her Birdbath

Somebody's aunt out swabbing her birdbath
with Lysol and the town papermill down the block
is beginning to blister in a clean shock
of light. You drive away. The math

is grammarschool: X thousand workers,
Y hundred jobs. The shoe factory closed last year.
Nobody's starving, but the church is in fear
it'll lose some paying customers.

A man steps out into his backyard's yellow air
apart now from his mortgage, his gripes.
He is perfectly lighted by secret animal stripes.
As you drive away a blunt wind parts his hair.

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Portfolio

Tuxedo

Jean Michel Basquiat

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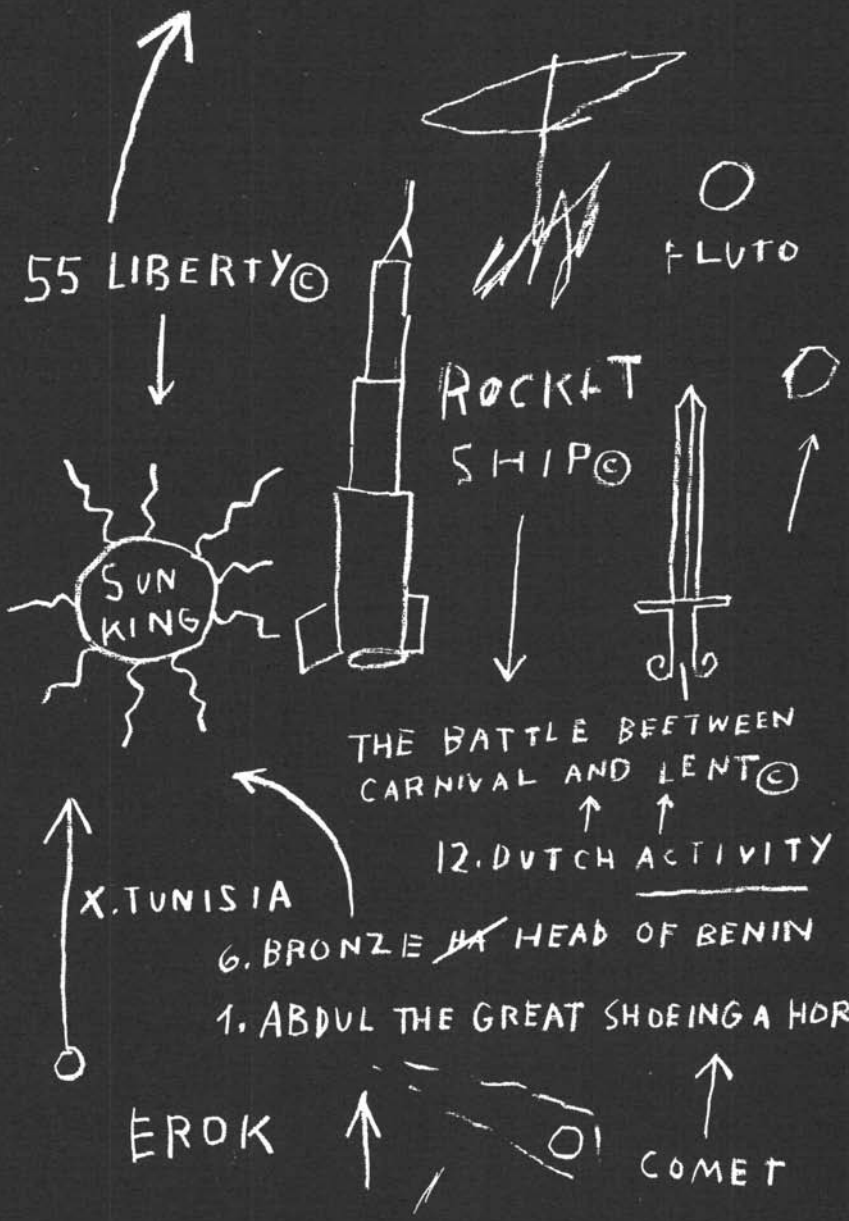

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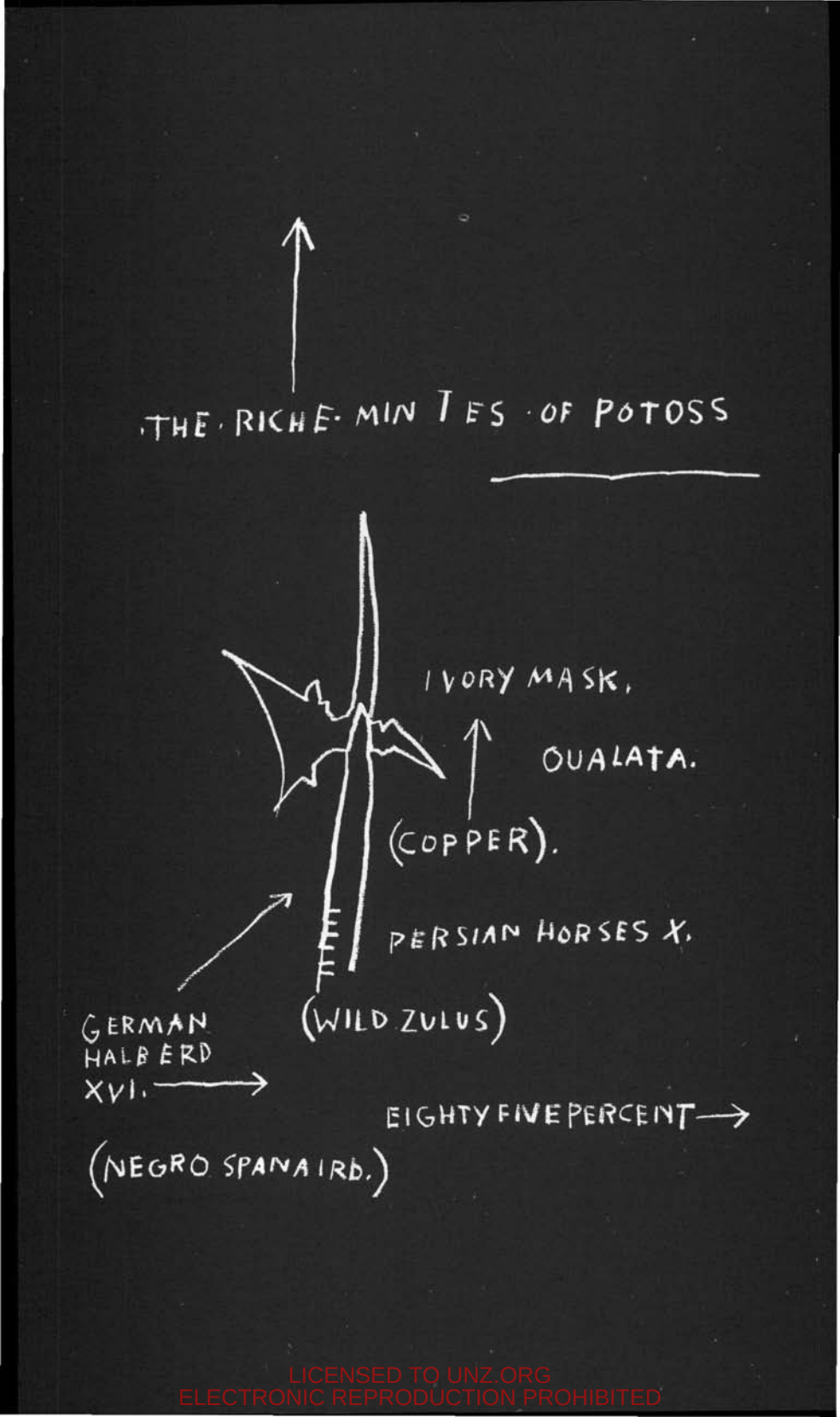

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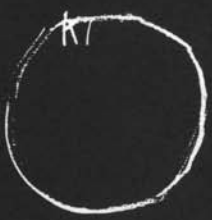

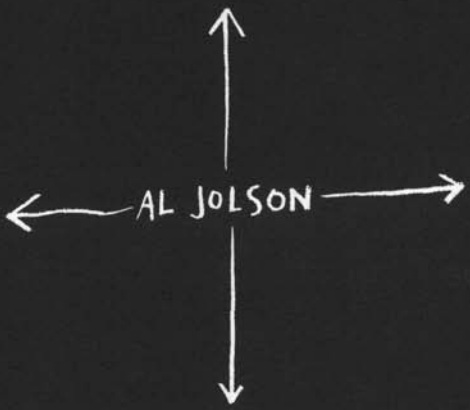

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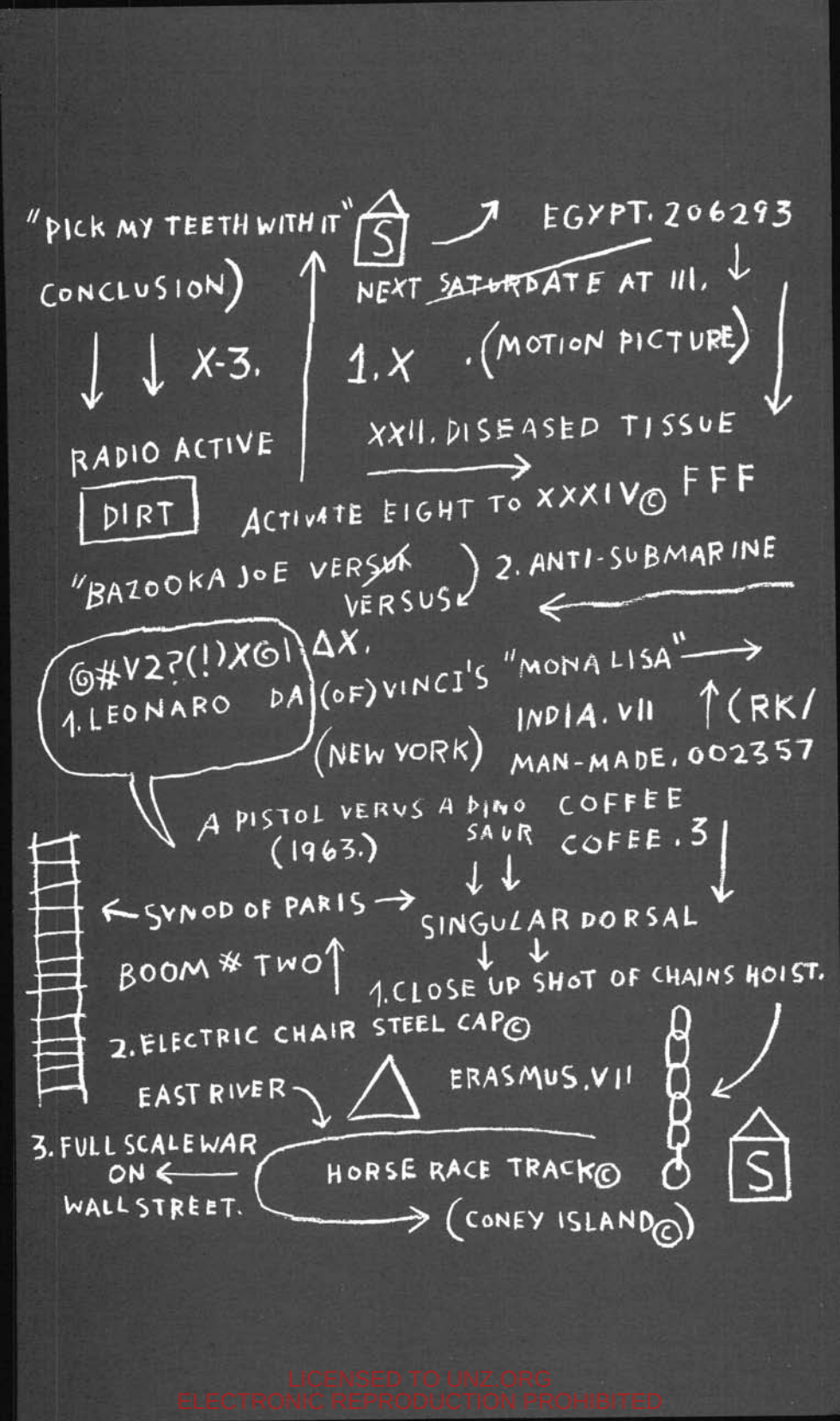

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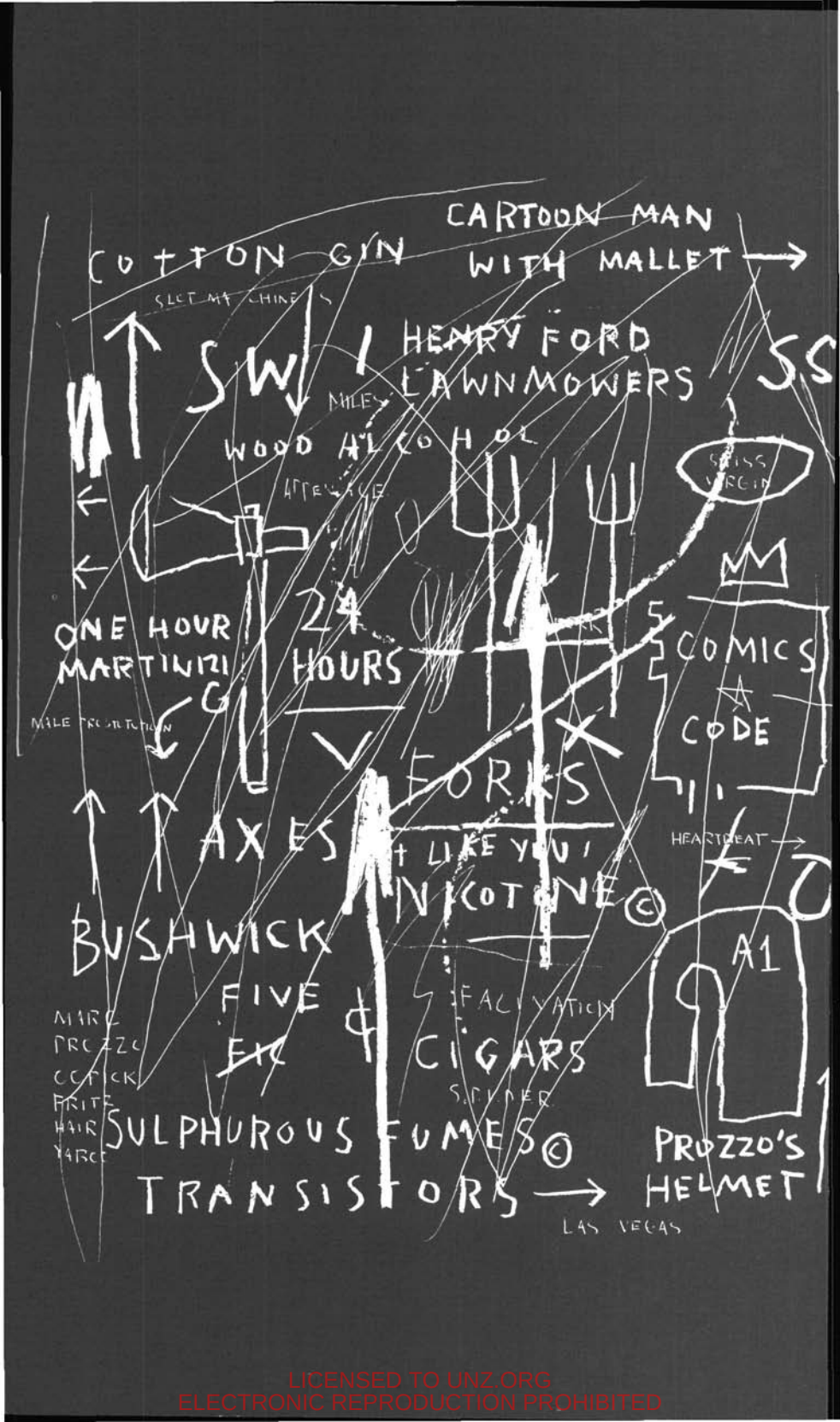

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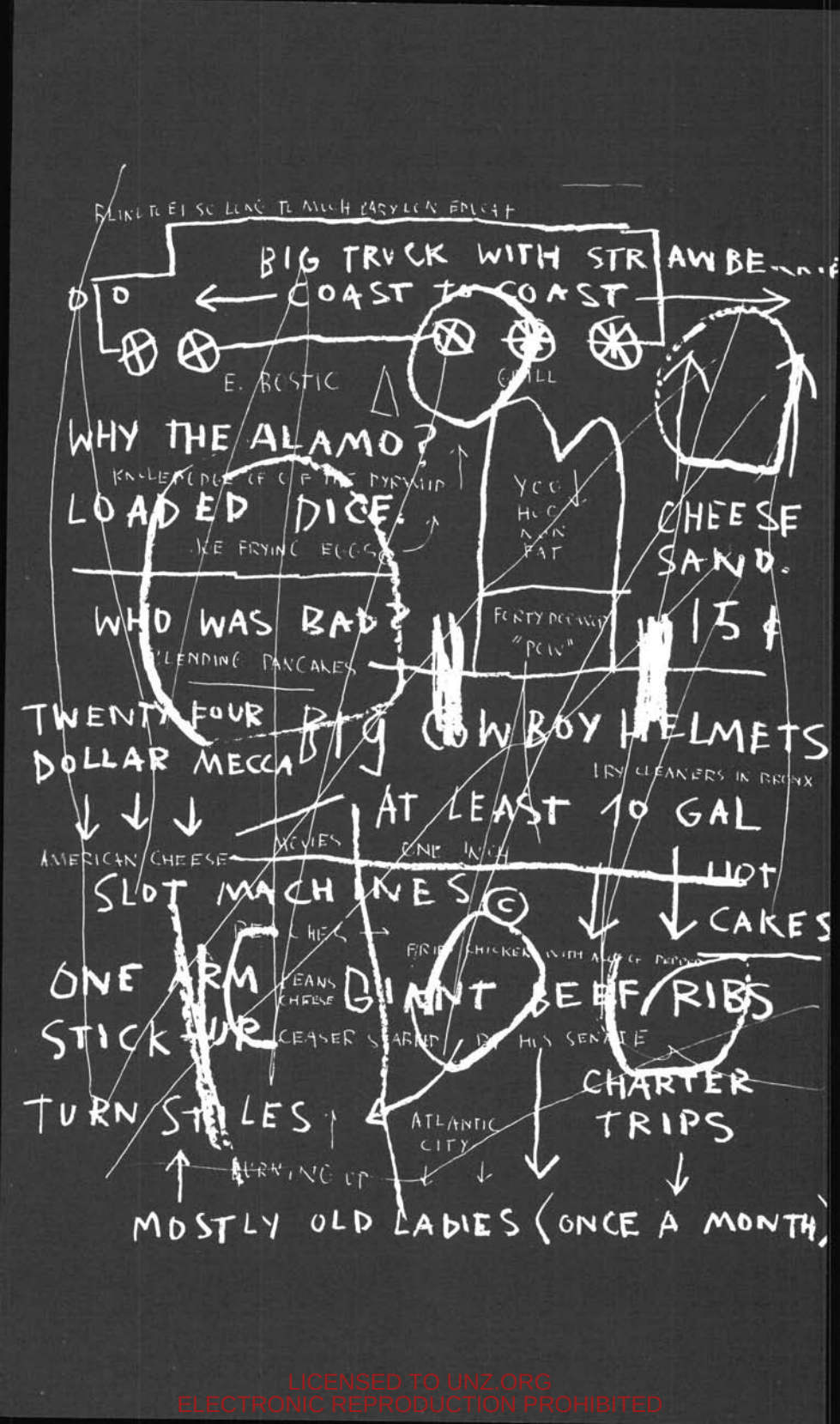

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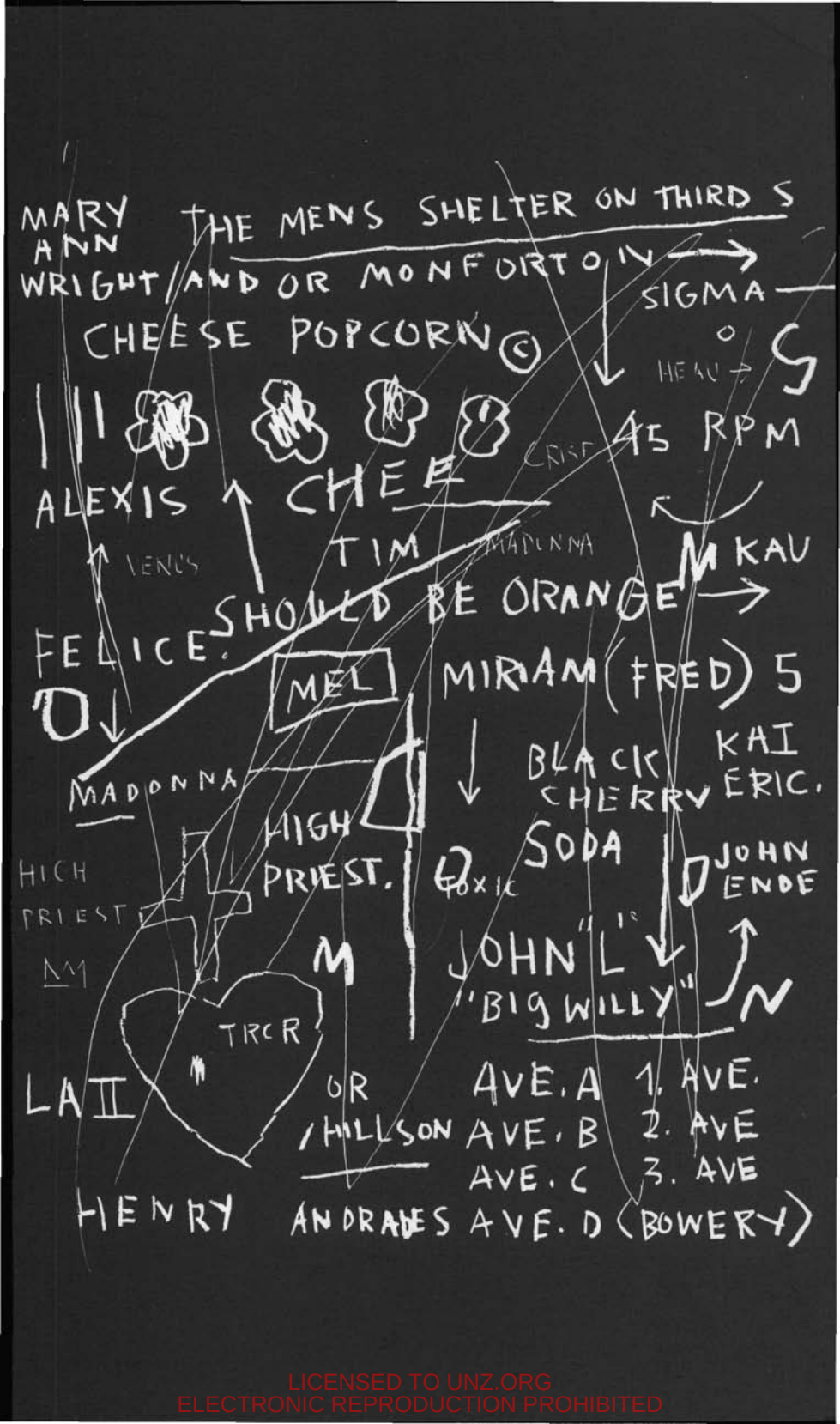

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Nairobi

Joyce Carol Oates

Early Saturday afternoon the man who had introduced himself as Oliver took Ginny to several shops on Madison Avenue above 70th Street to buy her what he called an appropriate outfit. For an hour and forty-five minutes she modelled clothes, watching with critical interest her image in the three-way mirrors, unable to decide if this was one of her really good days or only a mediocre day. Judging by Oliver's expression she looked all right but it was difficult to tell. The salesclerks saw too many beautiful young women to be impressed, though one told Ginny she envied her her hair—not just that shade of chestnut red but the thickness too. In the changing room she told Ginny that her own hair was "coming out in handfuls" but Ginny told her it didn't show. It will begin to show one of these days, the salesgirl said.

Ginny modelled a green velvet jumpsuit with a brass zipper and oversized buckles, and an Italian knit dress with bunchy sleeves in a zigzag pattern of beige, brown, and cream, and a ruffled organdy "tea dress" in pale orange, and a navy

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blue blazer made of Irish linen, with a pleated white linen skirt and a pale blue silk blouse. Assuming she could only have one costume, which seemed to be the case, she would have preferred the jumpsuit not just because it was the most expensive outfit (the price tag read $475) but because the green velvet reflected in her eyes. Oliver decided on the Irish linen blazer and the skirt and blouse, however, and told the salesclerk to remove the tags and to pack up Ginny's own clothes, since she intended to wear the new outfit.

Strolling uptown he told her that with her hair down like that, and her bangs combed low on her forehead, she looked like a "convent schoolgirl." In theory, that was. Tangentially.

It was a balmy windy day in early April. Everyone was out. Ginny kept seeing people she almost knew, Oliver waved hello to several acquaintances. There were baby buggies, dogs being walked, sports cars with their tops down. In shop windows—particularly in the broad windows of galleries—Ginny's reflection in the navy blue blazer struck her as unfamiliar and quirky but not bad: the blazer with its built-up shoulders and wide lapels was more stylish than she'd thought at first. Oliver too was pleased. He had slipped on steel-frame tinted glasses. He said they had plenty of time. A pair of good shoes—really good shoes—might be an idea.

But first they went into a jewelry boutique at 76th Street where Oliver bought her four narrow silver bracelets, engraved in bird and animal heads, and a pair of conch-shaped silver earrings from Mexico. Ginny slipped her gold studs out and put on the new earrings as Oliver watched. Doesn't it hurt to force those wires through your flesh? He was standing rather close.

No, Ginny said. My earlobes are numb, I don't feel a thing. It's easy.

When did you get your ears pierced? Oliver asked.

Ginny felt her cheeks color slightly—as if he were asking a favor of her and her instinct wasn't clear enough, whether to acquiesce or draw away just perceptibly. She drew away,

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still adjusting the earrings, but said: I don't have any idea, maybe I was thirteen, maybe twelve, it was a long time ago. We all went out and had our ears pierced.

In a salon called Michel's she exchanged her chunky-heeled red shoes for a pair of kidskin sandals that might have been the most beautiful shoes she'd ever seen. Oliver laughed quizzically over them: they were hardly anything but a few straps and a price tag, he told the salesman, but they looked like the real thing, they were what he wanted. The salesman told Oliver that his taste was "unerring."

Do you want to keep your old shoes? Oliver asked Ginny.

Of course, Ginny said, slightly hurt, but as the salesman was packing them she changed her mind. No, the hell with them, she said. They're too much trouble to take along.—Which she might regret afterward: but it was the right thing to say at that particular moment.

In the cab headed west and then north along the park Oliver gave her instructions in a low casual voice. The main thing was that she should say very little. She shouldn't smile unless it was absolutely necessary. While he and his friends spoke—if they spoke at any length, he couldn't predict Marguerite's attitude—Ginny might even drift away, pick up a magazine and leaf through it if something appropriate was available, not nervously, just idly, for something to do, as if she were bored: better yet she might look out the window or even step out on the terrace since the afternoon was so warm. Don't even look at me, Oliver said. Don't give the impression that anything I say—anything the three of us say—matters very much to you.

Yes, said Ginny.

The important thing, Oliver said, squeezing her hand and releasing it, is that you're basically not concerned. I mean with the three of us. With Marguerite. With anyone. Do you understand?

Yes, said Ginny. She was studying her new shoes. Kidskin in a shade called "vanilla," eight straps on each shoe, cer-

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tainly the most beautiful shoes she'd ever owned. The price had taken her breath away too. She hadn't any questions to ask Oliver.

When Ginny had been much younger—which is to say, a few years ago, when she was new to the city—she might have had some questions to ask. In fact she had had a number of questions to ask, then. But the answers had invariably disappointed. The answers had contained so much less substance than her own questions, she had learned, by degrees, not to ask.

So she told Oliver a second time, to assure *him*: Of course I understand.

The apartment building they entered at Fifth and 88th was older than Ginny might have guessed from the outside—the mosaic murals in the lobby were in a quaint ethereal style unknown to her. Perhaps they were meant to be amusing but she didn't think so. It was impressive that the uniformed doorman knew Oliver, whom he called "Mr. Leahy," and that he was so gracious about keeping their package for them while they visited upstairs; it was impressive that the black elevator operator nodded and murmured hello in a certain tone. Smiles were measured and respectful all around but Ginny didn't trouble to smile, she knew it wasn't expected of her.

In the elevator—which was almost uncomfortably small—Oliver looked at Ginny critically, standing back to examine her from her toes upward and finding nothing wrong except a strand of hair or two out of place. The Irish linen blazer was an excellent choice, he said. The earrings too. The bracelets. The shoes. He spoke with assurance though Ginny had the idea he was nervous, or excited. He turned to study his own reflection in the bronze-frosted mirror on the elevator wall, facing it with a queer childlike squint. This was his "mirror face," Ginny supposed, the way he had of confronting himself in the mirror so that it wasn't *really* himself but a certain habitual expression that protected him. Ginny hadn't any mirror face herself. She had gone beyond that, she knew

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better, those childish frowns and half-smiles and narrowed eyes and heads turned coyly or hopefully to one side—ways of protecting her from seeing "Ginny" when the truth of "Ginny" was that she required being seen head-on. But it would have been difficult to explain to another person.

Oliver adjusted his handsome blue-striped cotton tie and ran his fingers deftly through his hair. It was pale, fine, airily colorless hair, blond perhaps, shading into premature silver, rather thin, Ginny thought, for a man his age. (She estimated his age at thirty-four, which seemed "old" to her in certain respects, but she knew it was reasonably "young" in others.) Oliver's skin was slightly coarse; his nose wide at the bridge, and the nostrils disfigured by a few dark hairs that should have been snipped off; his lower jaw was somewhat heavy. But he was a handsome man. In his steel-rimmed blue-tinted glasses he was a handsome man and Ginny saw for the first time that they made an attractive couple.

Don't trouble to answer any questions they might ask, Oliver said. In any case the questions won't be serious—just conversation.

I understand, Ginny said.

A Hispanic maid answered the door. The elevator and the corridor had been so dimly lit, Ginny wasn't prepared for the flood of sunlight in the apartment. They were on the eighteenth floor overlooking the park and the day was still cloudless.

Oliver introduced Ginny to his friends Marguerite and Herbert—the last name sounded like Crews—and Ginny shook hands with them unhesitatingly, as if it were a customary gesture with her. The first exchanges were about the weather. Marguerite was vehement in her gratitude since the past winter, January in particular, had been uncommonly long and dark and depressing. Ginny assented without actually agreeing. For the first minute or two she felt thrown off balance, she couldn't have said why, by the fact that Marguerite Crews was so tall a woman—taller even than Ginny. And she was, or had been, a very beautiful woman as well,

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with a pale olive-dark complexion and severely black hair parted in the center of her head and fixed in a careless knot at the nape of her neck.

Oliver was explaining apologetically that they couldn't stay. Not even for a drink, really: they were in fact already late for another engagement in the Village. Both the Crews expressed disappointment. And Oliver's plans for the weekend had been altered as well, unavoidably. At this announcement the disappointment was keener, and Ginny looked away before Marguerite's eyes could lock with hers.

But Oliver was working too hard, Marguerite protested.

But he *must* come out to the Point as they'd planned, Herbert said, and bring his friend along.

Ginny eased discreetly away. She was aloof, indifferent, just slightly bored, but unfailingly courteous: a mark of good breeding. And the Irish linen blazer and skirt were just right.

After a brief while Herbert Crews came over to comment on the view and Ginny thought it wouldn't be an error to agree: the view of Central Park was, after all, something quite real. He told her they'd lived here for eleven years "off and on." They travelled a good deal, he was required to travel almost more than he liked, being associated with an organization Ginny might have heard of—the Zieboldt Foundation. He had just returned from Nairobi, he said. Two days ago. And still feeling the strain—the fatigue. Ginny thought that his affable talkative "social" manner showed not the least hint of fatigue but did not make this observation to Herbert Crews.

She felt a small pinprick of pity for the way Marguerite Crews's collarbones showed through her filmy muslin "Indian" blouse, and for the extreme thinness of her waist (cinched tight with a belt of silver coins or medallions), and for the faint scolding voice—so conspicuously a "voice"—with which she was speaking to Oliver. She saw that Oliver, though smiling nervously, and standing in a self-conscious pose with the thumb of his right hand hooked in his sports coat pocket, was enjoying the episode very much—she noted

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for the first time something vehement and cruel though at the same time unmistakably boyish in his face. Herbert Crews was telling her about Nairobi but she couldn't concentrate on his words. She was wondering if it might be proper to ask where Nairobi was—she assumed it was a country somewhere in Africa—but Herbert Crews continued, speaking now with zest of the wild animals, including great herds of "the most exquisitely beautiful gazelles," in the Kenya preserves. Had she ever been there, he asked. No, Ginny said. Well, said Herbert, nodding vigorously, it really *is* worth it. Next time Marguerite promised to come along.

Ginny heard Oliver explain again that they were already late for an appointment in the Village, unfortunately they couldn't stay for a drink, yes it was a pity but he hoped they might do it another time: with which Marguerite warmly agreed. Though it was clearly all right for Oliver and Ginny to leave now, Herbert Crews was telling her about the various animals he'd seen—elands, giraffes, gnus, hippopotami, crocodiles, zebras, "feathered monkeys," impalas—he had actually eaten impala and found it fairly good. But the trip was fatiguing and his business in Nairobi disagreeable. He'd discovered—as in fact the Foundation had known from certain clumsily fudged reports—that the microbiological research being subsidized there had not only come to virtually nothing, but that vast sums of money had "disappeared" into nowhere. Ginny professed to feel some sympathy though at the same time, as she said, she wasn't surprised. Well, she said, easing away from Herbert Crews's side, that seems to be human nature, doesn't it. All around the world.

Americans and Swedes this time, Herbert Crews said, —equally taken in.

It couldn't be avoided that Herbert tell Oliver what he'd been saying—Oliver in fact seemed to be interested, he might have had some indirect connection with the Foundation himself—but unfortunately they were late for their engagement downtown, and within five minutes they were out of the apartment and back in the elevator going down.

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Oliver withdrew a handkerchief from his breast pocket, unfolded it, and carefully wiped his forehead. Ginny was studying her reflection in the mirror and felt a pinprick of disappointment—her eyes looked shadowed and tired, and her hair wasn't really all that wonderful, falling straight to her shoulders. Though she'd shampooed it only that morning it was already getting dirty—the wind had been so strong on their walk up Madison.

On Fifth Avenue, in the gusty sunlight, they walked together for several blocks. Ginny slid her arm through Oliver's as if they were being watched but at an intersection they were forced to walk at different paces and her arm slipped free. It was time in any case to say goodbye: she sensed that he wasn't going to ask her, even out of courtesy, to have a drink with him: and she had made up her mind not to feel even tangentially insulted. After all, she hadn't been insulted.

He signalled a cab for her. He handed over the pink cardboard box with her denim jumper and sweater in it and shook her hand vigorously. You were lovely up there, Oliver said, —just perfect. Look, I'll call you, all right?

She felt the weight, the subtle dizzying blow, of the "were." But she thanked him just the same. And got into the cab. And wasn't so stricken by a sudden fleeting sense of loss—of loss tinged with a queer cold sickish knowledge—that, as the cab pulled away into the traffic stream, she couldn't give him a final languid wave of her hand, and even shape her mouth into a puckish kiss. All she had really lost, in a sense, was her own pair of shoes.

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LITERARY HAPPENINGS: CHINA–II

Introductory Note

The interest in the feature entitled "China: Literary Happenings," which appeared in the last issue of The Paris Review, *has been such that the magazine has asked Timothy Tung, who collected the material, to put additional questions to Dong Leshan whose short story, "The Topsy-Turvy World of Professor Fu," was featured. Dong, who is a visiting scholar at Cornell University, had been asked a number of questions about his story and the current state of writing and publishing in today's China. What follows is an extension to those remarks.*

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AN INTERVIEW WITH DONG LESHAN

INTERVIEWER

You said that during the Cultural Revolution no one wrote unless they wrote what Jiang Qing wanted them to write. How did one know what to write? Were there directives? Surely writing didn't stop completely.

DONG

Indeed, writing didn't stop completely—for those few who toadied Jiang Qing's line. But practically all other writers and artists were under attack and accused of being either feudal, bourgeois, or revisionist, or all of the three. Most were put under "investigation in solitary confinement"—a creation of the Gang of Four's "legal" device under which anyone could be detained and confined in his office building, not allowed to go home and to communicate with those on the outside. Others were sent to the countryside to do farm labor. Jiang Qing frequently gave comments on and, in most cases, severe criticism of literary works in her talks at the assemblies of the Red Guards. They served as informal directives for those who tried to please her and survive and were widely publicized in newspapers.

INTERVIEWER

Was there a clandestine press? One thinks of mimeographed copies of Pasternak handed around during similar times of suppression in the Soviet Union. Was there anything like this in China?

DONG

There was never a clandestine press in the sense you mean. However, in the latter period of the Cultural Revolution, just a few years before 1976, some handwritten novels did appear and secretly circulated among the people, copied by hand over and over again. The most popular among these "underground best sellers" is *The Second Handshake*, written by a

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young worker named Zhang Yang, a romantic tale about a Chinese-American woman scholar who comes back to China to find her old love. For writing this novel (and for diverting people's attention from their legitimate reading material) Zhang Yang was arrested and jailed. He was released only after the normalization of Sino-American relations, when his novel was published and even made into a film—to commemorate the solidarity of U.S.–China friendship, no doubt. It is decidedly not a literary work. Neither is *The Plum Party,* another handwritten, hand-copied, secretly circulated novel during that period. This one is even wilder than *The Second Handshake*; a spy story about underground activities of Communist and Kuomintang agents. So, as you can see, they were written purely to entertain.

INTERVIEWER

How can it be that the millions who were the Gang of Four's cadres during the Great Cultural Revolution, and enforced the edicts, changed their views so abruptly at the Gang's downfall?

DONG

The Law of Survival.

INTERVIEWER

You said last time that "The Topsy-Turvy World of Professor Fu," if written today, would be less subtle and more openly critical: Is this a growing trend in Chinese literature today? Will literary freedom eventually result in a denunciation of current conditions and policies?

DONG

There is no question that Chinese writers are enjoying more freedom of expression than ever before, but of course it is still not the kind of abandoned freedom you have in the West, as I said last time. Mao's Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art have been reevaluated. Literature no longer must serve politics alone, but it still has to "serve the people." For those works which are not considered in the

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interests of the people, criticism of the authors is swift, but no longer as devastating and personal as it used to be. You have heard of Bai Hua's case. After being reprimanded, he is still writing and publishing.

INTERVIEWER

Please elaborate.

DONG

Bai Hua is a renowned army writer whose script for the film *Unrequited Love* a few years ago aroused such an uproar that the debate reached the attention of the highest echelon of the Communist Party. The story is about a successful overseas Chinese artist who, out of love for his motherland, gives up his fame and wealth in America to return home only to be hounded to death by the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution. The final shot of the film is a question mark in the snow left by his erratic footprints before death. The essence of the criticism is that, one, in attacking the behavior of the radicals, Bai Hua equated the renegades to the whole Party system and therefore deviated from the correct path, and two, by ending on a note of total hopelessness the film was too negative to be of redeemable value. Bai Hua has since accepted the criticism and apologized. He was not otherwise punished.

INTERVIEWER

Would Professor Fu's wife be playing the piano today? Were such artifacts of Western decadence destroyed or collected?

DONG

Not only is Professor Fu's wife unrestrainedly playing the piano today, but her daughter and son in all probability are taking piano or violin lessons. No longer considered "artifacts of Western decadence," but rather instruments of Western culture, those which were confiscated during the Cultural Revolution, if not already destroyed, were returned to their original owners.

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INTERVIEWER

Are there aspects of ancient Chinese culture which, though denied by the Gang of Four, have been resurrected recently? If so, how have these elements been incorporated into modern fiction?

DONG

I can mention a number of human aspects, common to all people, not necessarily of ancient Chinese culture, that were once denied by the Gang of Four and that have been resurrected: love, honor, family life, respect for elders, respect for education, respect for intellectualism .... The first novel daringly dealing with love as subject was written by a woman, Zhang Jie, who has gone on to become one of the most popular writers. Admittedly *Love Cannot Be Forgotten* details only *platonic* love between a woman and a married party cadre, but it served to open doors for later stories which use love between man and woman as the theme.

INTERVIEWER

What happened to the writers like Wang Meng and Liu Binyan during the reign of the Gang of Four? Did they continue to write in secret?

DONG

Writers like Wang Meng and Liu Binyan fell into disgrace long before the reign of the Gang of Four took place. Many were already sent away to remote areas "to remold their thought through manual labor" at the start of the Anti-Rightist Movement in 1957. Even the Stalin Literary Prize winner, Ding Ling, could not escape such fate. After the "thought remolding," they were given a clerical position or any demeaning job in some small town or village. They could not have the chance to go on writing, in secret or not.

INTERVIEWER

It is interesting that those American novels which have sold best in China—*The Winds of War*, *Gone With the Wind*, are all of a historical nature. Could you explain the appeal of something like *Gone With the Wind?*

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DONG

Historical novels, and family saga for that matter, are by tradition Chinese readers' favorites. The three most-read classical Chinese novels, *The Three Kingdoms*, *All Men Are Brothers*, *The Dream of Red Chamber*, all belong to these two categories. Now, after thirty years of isolation, Chinese are eager to learn about the outside world, especially America. *The Winds of War* tells about America in the Second World War. Incidently, the reason Arthur Hailey's novels have been translated and are popular is that they seem to satisfy Chinese readers' curiosity about different aspects of life in the United States: hospital, airport, auto-town, hotel, banking system. As for the appeal of *Gone With the Wind*, to put it simply, because it is great romance. The novel reminds Chinese readers much of the works of Zhang Henshui, an extremely popular writer of romance novels of the 1930s. Come to think of it, Taylor Caldwell will do well in China.

INTERVIEWER

It seems as if Chinese stories contain a moral message. Is this considered an essential element of good literature?

DONG

Yes, a moral message is considered an essential element of good literature. Maybe that's why some Western novels are incomprehensible to average Chinese readers.

INTERVIEWER

In what direction do you see Chinese literature going now that reading is, as you say, "allowed"? Is it *encouraged*? Are certain books still promoted as more acceptable than all the others?

DONG

"Allowed" is your word, not mine. Yes, reading of literature is definitely encouraged now that the destructive period has ended. And writing is encouraged. A variety of short-story prizes, some nationwide, some province-wide, are given each year. Authors selected win instant fame. Only last year, a Mao Dun Memorial Literary Prize was initiated, with the

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donation of 100,000 yuan (about $50,000) from the famous writer's will as foundation money. May I mention a few names who have won different prizes? They may be unfamiliar to your readers, but they are worth watching. Gu Hua, Jiang Zhilong, Deng Youmei, Gao Xiaosheng, Chen Rong, Liu Xinwu.

INTERVIEWER

Where do people buy books? Are there local privately-owned bookstores? Or state-owned bookstores? Or both?

DONG

Bookstores are all state-owned, the chief among which is Xin Hua (New China) Bookstore, with its network of branches scattered all over the country. Then there is China Bookstore, which deals with Chinese classics, used books, and even rare books. Another is Waiwen (Foreign Language) Bookstore, which sells books published by the Foreign Language Press. There are no privately-owned bookstores.

INTERVIEWER

Are books reviewed? Where? Is reviewing a viable vocation for a person?

DONG

Books are reviewed, but not regularly. *Dushu* is the publication where most reviews appear. Book reviewing is not at all a viable vocation for a person, the reason being that writers and scholars are too busy writing their own books to read others' work, let alone review it. Well-known authors do occasionally write a piece recommending a work, in most cases full of praises. Editors of *Dushu* are now conscientiously promoting book reviewing as a distinct form of art.

INTERVIEWER

Are all the publishing companies state-owned?

DONG

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

How many publishing companies are there?

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DONG

I don't have the figure with me. As a rule, in each province there is a state-owned People's Publishing House. Large cities such as Peking, Shanghai also have their own local People's Publishing Houses. In addition, there is a national People's Publishing House located in Peking. Privately-owned publishing companies in pre-Liberation (1949) days, taken over by the state, are still in existence and retain their names, academic independence and specialties: The Joint Publishers publishes books of current interest; The Commercial Press specializes in Western classics; Zhong Hua Book Publisher concentrates on Chinese classics, etc. These formerly privately-owned publishing companies were all shut down during the Cultural Revolution. Then there are: Literature Publishing House which specializes in Chinese and foreign literature; Shanghai Translation Publishing House which publishes exclusively translations of foreign literature; and other publishing houses which specialize in science, education, or children's books.

INTERVIEWER

What did the publishing houses do during the Cultural Revolution?

DONG

Many simply closed down and their personnel were sent down to the countryside to do farm work. A few remaining were left to publish, almost exclusively and in enormous quantity, works such as *Chairman Mao's Quotations* (the Little Red Book), the *Complete Works of Chairman Mao*, collections of the *People's Daily*'s editorials, and reprints of articles and speeches by Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyuan, the literate two of the Gang of Four.

INTERVIEWER

Did the personnel of the publishing companies change when the Cultural Revolution occurred? Did the personnel change when it was finished?

DONG

Veteran editors were invariably sent away to the countryside,

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and their jobs taken over by young adherents of Jiang Qing and the Gang. When the Cultural Revolution was finished, except for a few who had succumbed to the severe test, they invariably returned to their old jobs, some even given more important positions.

INTERVIEWER

What does a literature student in China actually study? What Western literature? What authors?

DONG

All Chinese universities have a department of Chinese literature and a department of foreign literature. Some offer special programs in American and English literature. Courses for a foreign-literature student include literary histories, drama, the novel, poetry, etc., and authors studied include the usual names: Shakespeare, Dickens, Shaw, Balzac, Hugo, Maupassant, Sartre, Whitman, Thoreau, Poe, Mark Twain, Hemingway, Steinbeck....Beida (Peking University), Nanjing University, and Fudan University in Shanghai are specially known for good programs in American literature. Current authors like Bellow and Roth are also studied, and classes in most instances are conducted in English. An organization called Society for the Study of American Literature, with its members China's most prominent professors, writers and translators and its base at Shandong University, publishes a quarterly called *American Literature*.

INTERVIEWER

Is Chinese education directed towards creative production? Are there creative writing classes or seminars? On what level?

DONG

We don't believe that creative writing can be taught. I am rather surprised that there are so many writing schools and creative writing workshops in America. Even in reputable, first-rate universities, creative writing classes seem to have become an integrated component of academic programs. I often wonder what a person who has received a graduate degree in creative writing will do after school. Become a

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teacher of creative writing? No, I believe there is only one way for a person to learn creative writing, if he has the talent and the inclination: Write. Actually three elements account for a successful writer: read a lot, experience life a lot, write a lot.

INTERVIEWER

How many literary magazines are there? How are most submissions to these magazines received—neatly handwritten? I know there is no Chinese typewriter to speak of.

DONG

The rough estimate is well over six hundred. Remember, there was an explosion of publications right after the fall of the Gang of Four. Almost in every remote town in a remote province there is some small magazine whose circulation, of course, is limited to local readership. Literary magazines published in big cities or by provincial publishing houses usually receive national attention. There are about thirty magazines dealing exclusively with foreign literature. All submissions are handwritten, mostly very neat, except a few by spoiled, established writers. Since there is no device such as a typewriter in use, publishing houses hire young clerks good at calligraphy whose job it is to handcopy manuscripts to be ready for print.

INTERVIEWER

In what form are most manuscripts received? With a self-addressed envelope? Return postage included? How much does it cost to send a manuscript? How long does it tend to stay in a publisher's hands before a rejection?

DONG

I'll answer your last question first. A manuscript usually stays in a publisher's hands about three to six months before a rejection or an acceptance. Editors and publishers have an obligation to return the manuscript if rejected; therefore, no self-addressed envelope and return postage are necessary. As for the cost to send a manuscript, the postage for a letter is eight fen (about four cents). So it all depends on weight.

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Incidentally, Chinese do have typewriters in use. They are heavy, clumsy and slow, chiefly used for mimeographing official letters or documents.

INTERVIEWER

What do the rejection slips say? Would there be editorial suggestions?

DONG

Unlike a printed rejection slip in America, a rejection *letter* is written by an editor, if not as an obligation, at least as a courtesy. The reasons for rejection are explained and comments and suggestions, sometimes in great detail, are given.

INTERVIEWER

To whom would one send a first novel, say?

DONG

Directly to a publishing house, or to a magazine for serialization.

INTERVIEWER

How many first novels are published a year in China?

DONG

I don't know about first novels. If you want to know how many novels are published a year, I happen to have the figures at hand: fifty-two in 1977, fifty-five in 1978, sixty-one in 1979, ninety in 1980, and one hundred and six in 1981. Short novels (you call them novelettes or novellas?) published in magazines in 1981 are four hundred and four, and short stories more than three thousand.

INTERVIEWER

Are there literary agents?

DONG

A pure product of capitalistic society. There are no literary agents in China acting as middlemen living on the sweat and labor of writers.

INTERVIEWER

What is the state of poetry in China? Are American poets read? Which ones?

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DONG

Poetry is quite popular in China. Now there is a difference. I often wonder how an American poet can survive on writing poetry alone. There are hardly any outlets. In China, in every literary journal and literary supplement of a newspaper there appear poems. Poetry sells very well. For instance, a collection of poems by well-known poets such as Ai Qing sells more than ten thousand copies in Peking alone! In universities, American poets from Whitman on down to Ezra Pound, Emily Dickinson are taught. Sylvia Plath, Robert Frost, Robert Lowell, Allen Ginsberg, to mention just a few, have all been translated.

INTERVIEWER

The state of translation?

DONG

The state of translation is more lively than ever before. Publishing houses are beginning to shift their attention from world classics to modern writers. Saul Bellow's *Humboldt's Gift*, Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, Isaac B. Singer's *The Magician of Lublin*, Philip Roth's *The Ghost Writer*, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse 5* and Vladimir Nabokov's *Pnin* are among the titles translated in recent years. Then there are popular writers like Arthur Hailey; almost every novel of his has been translated. I think I have mentioned to you once that a "self-sustaining" policy has encouraged local and provincial publishing houses to publish whatever (well, almost) that can sell. Agatha Christie was *the* best seller at one time a few years ago. Readers also go for spy novels, science fiction, and fantasy stories. Isaac Asimov and Ray Bradbury are also gaining ground.

INTERVIEWER

Is there an "avant-garde"? What writers?

DONG

Chinese are beginning to experiment with what they consider new techniques such as "stream of consciousness method" and "obscure poetry." They can hardly be called "avant-garde," but to Chinese writers perhaps they are.

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When Wang Meng attempted the "stream of consciousness method" in his short story "Dream of the Sea," he was roundly praised and criticized. A heated debate over its merits ensued. Realism being the leading force in Chinese writing, anything different is frowned upon as deviation. Wang Meng has not attempted anything new since.

INTERVIEWER

What is the prestige of being a writer? For example, in Japan the novel is considered a lesser art form than poetry, weaving, or even bunraku. Is the novel highly respected?

DONG

I beg to disagree with you that the novel is considered a lesser art in Japan. Didn't Yasunari Kawabata win a Nobel Prize? In any case the novel is highly regarded in China. Ba Jin, the greatest living writer in China today, is a novelist who commands great respect from the people and the officialdom alike. Politics aside, most veteran novelists are also adept in classic poetry. In general, being a published writer is a prestigious status.

INTERVIEWER

How much is a writer paid for his work? A novel? A short story? Could a writer live by his pen alone?

DONG

By Chinese standard, a writer is very well paid. In the first place, a writer who works as a factory worker, a teacher, or a bus driver receives his normal salary which averages 60-70 yuan (about $30-35) a month. Payment from his writings is additional income. The normal rate, whether it is for a novel or a short story in a magazine, is about five to ten yuan per thousand words. An established writer can easily make two to four thousand yuan a year. Professional writers who do not have an occupation may be elected to the Writers' Union from which as members they receive a monthly stipend comparable to the average salary. Writers are therefore double...double...how do you Americans say?

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INTERVIEWER

Double-dipping.

DONG

Yes, double-dipping. It doesn't seem to be very fair to non-writers. Recently, Writers' Union in Hanzhou has introduced a new device under which a member receives only a small stipend for basic living expenses but must depend on his income from writing for other things.

INTERVIEWER

What is the most common subsidiary occupation for a writer? Teaching?

DONG

In China, it is a soldier, a farmer, a worker, a teacher who becomes a writer, rather than a writer who turns to teaching or farming for a subsidiary occupation. Of course, as I discussed above, once a soldier, say, becomes a published writer, his station in the army also rises.

INTERVIEWER

What kind of communication exists between literary people?

DONG

Members of the Writers' Union often meet at the local headquarters for social or official purposes. Seminars, conferences, talks of out-of-town visitors are frequently held. Close writer-friends also regularly organize informal dinners, to which each brings a dish and ideas. There are three International PEN Centers in China: Peking, Shanghai, and Guangzhou (Canton).

INTERVIEWER

Short stories are obviously a source of great entertainment in China. How do you account for their immense popularity?

DONG

The popularity of short stories as a source of entertainment in China goes back many centuries. Illiterate peasants always

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had a passion for listening to tales. As a matter of fact, oral storytelling had evolved into a distinctive art which a father would pass on to a son. Professional traveling storytellers were always a most welcome sight in villages. In old China, the short story had long been a highly developed literary form. Classics such as *Strange Tales of A Scholar's Study*, to mention just one, are still being avidly read today.

INTERVIEWER

What is the influence of television on Chinese culture?

DONG

In speaking of the influence of television on Chinese culture, one must first discard American notions of television programs, which are commercially oriented. Chinese television is state-controlled. Its purpose is educational, informational. Entertainment comes third. Lowbrow, mindless situation comedies, such as are universally loved in America, have no place in China. But teleplays, some original and some adopted from novels and short stories, are beginning to gain popularity on Chinese television. As in short stories, they always contain a moral message. So entertainment and education are one and the same.

INTERVIEWER

How many people own televisions? Telephones?

DONG

Unlike Americans or Japanese, most Chinese people do not own televisions. Despite its potential as a great education (and propaganda) tool, televised broadcasting as an industry is still at an infant stage. A black and white set costs about 400 yuan and a color set 1,000 yuan, imported ones much higher. But people are willing to spend large savings on televisions. All working units in factories and communes own sets, so television-watching for most part has become a communal pastime. Telephones are still rarer. Like automobiles, private ownership of a telephone is almost unheard of. Most recently, I heard that in Shanghai the installment of private telephones has started—provided one can afford such

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luxury. In Peking, public phone booths are being installed. For most part people use office phones or neighborhood phones to communicate. Incidentally, mail service is quite efficient. In Peking, a letter posted in the morning can definitely reach its destiny the next day, frequently in the same afternoon.

INTERVIEWER

In the Western world, there are romantic notions linked to the creative profession—the starving artist, for example. Do these "noble" connotations exist in China today?

DONG

Romantic notions that link the creative professions to the starving artist are indeed not a Western exclusivity. You yourself must remember that in our younger days, to be a writer meant to live in an attic room and to eat an occasional meal. But we aspired to join such a noble profession and were not easily dissuaded by our parents. Such "noble" connotations, however, no longer exist in China today. As we have discussed above, writers need not starve.

INTERVIEWER

Is being a writer considered a desirable aspiration for a young person?

DONG

Being a writer is considered not only a desirable but an enviable aspiration for young people, especially among high school and college students. Then there are those educated youths (no longer young today) who were sent to relocate in the Great Northern Wilderness (remote, desolate areas in the bone-chilling Northeast) and who are back in the cities bursting to tell about their experiences.

INTERVIEWER

What strikes you as the main difference between occidental and oriental writing?

DONG

The word "oriental" would encompass a variety of

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cultures. I can speak only of Chinese writing—more specifically, Chinese writing as currently practiced in China. And, by occidental writing, do you mean English (American) writing? I find the most obvious difference, in language at least, is that American writing is more concise, precise, more to the point, hardly a word wasted, while in Chinese writing, superfluous words and phrases abound. This perhaps has a great deal to do with the editing. Whereas an editor in America is a more defined profession, editors in China for the most part are themselves writers who tend to love a well-turned sentence which they hate to leave out. Chinese writers love to use adjectives and adverbs. The tendency is: more is better than less. This difference is most forcefully manifested in journalistic and polemic writings.

In fiction writing, I am most struck by the abundance of descriptions of a character's inner thoughts, his psychological makeup, clinically analytical. This method, I think, is very helpful to the establishing and defining of a character. Characterization in a Chinese novel is more direct, more obvious, and much less complex. Perhaps Americans would simply call our style of writing social-realism. Although the Chinese are experimenting with new forms, the problem is that some writers who attempt the imitation do so so superficially that they mistake ambiguity for depth.

INTERVIEWER

One last question. What have you translated lately?

DONG

I have just finished Vonnegut's *Jailbird*. It's on the way to a publishing house in Peking.

—Timothy Tung

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

James Baker Hall's second novel, *Music for a Broken Piano* will be published this spring by the Fiction Collective. In 1981, he held a National Endowment for the Arts grant in poetry writing; recent poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *The New Yorker*, and *Ploughshares*.

Joyce Carol Oates teaches at Princeton University. Her most recent book is *The Profane Art: Essays and Reviews* (Dutton).

Roger Salloch has another long story in the next issue of *Fiction* and a hand in Casta Gavros's next movie, *Hanna*. He writes screenplays and stories and lives in Paris, where he is the Paris Editor of *The Paris Review*.

Paul West's most recent novel is *The Very Rich Hours of Count von Stauffenberg*, for which he received the Hazlett Memorial Award for Excellence in the Arts. His next book, *Out of My Depths: A Swimmer in the Universe*, will be published with Anchor Press this winter.

POETRY

Stephen Ajay teaches at the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland.

Stanislaw Barańczak, a recent Polish emigré, is now teaching at Harvard. An interview with him appeared in a recent issue of *The Manhattan Review*.

Tory Dent, a recent graduate of Barnard, lives in Manhattan.

Jonathan Griffin, the distinguished English poet, dramatist, and translator, has had several collections published in the U.S., among them *In This Transparent Forest* and *In Time of Crowding* (Green River). Penguin will be reissuing his acclaimed English versions of poems by the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa.

Siri Hustvedt's chapbook, *Reading to You*, has just been published by Station Hill Press. She lives in New York.

Lawrence Joseph's collection of poems, *Shouting at No One*, will be published by the Pittsburgh University Press Poetry Series. Mr. Joseph practices law in New York City.

Thomas Lux, who teaches at Sarah Lawrence, is completing a new collection of poems. His most recent collection, *Sunday*, was published by Houghton-Mifflin.

Czeslaw Milosz's new book of poems, *The Separate Notebooks*, translated by the author with the assistance of Robert Pinsky, Robert Hass, and Renata Gorczynski, will appear this fall in a bi-lingual edition with The Ecco Press.

Robert Pinsky's new collection of poems, *The History of My Heart*, will also be published by Ecco, in 1984. He teaches at Berkeley.

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Liam Rector is now living in San Francisco, where he works at the Julian Theatre. His first book of poems, *The Weather Gallery*, is forthcoming.
C.K. Williams, winner of the third Bernard F. Conners Prize for a long poem, will publish *Tar*, his fourth collection, with Random House in the fall. He is living in New York and teaching at George Mason University in Virginia.

INTERVIEWS

Alfred Mac Adams's last book, *Latin American Narratives*, was published by the University of Chicago Press in 1977. He is currently working on a book of comparative essays entitled, *Textual Confrontation* and will be joining the faculty of Barnard College in September.
A. Leslie Willson, a professor of German at the University of Austin, is also the editor of *Dimension*, a literary magazine devoted to contemporary German writing. He has translated two plays by Günter Grass, *The Wicked Cooks*, produced in New York, and *Uptight*, produced in Washington D.C.

ART

Jean Michel Basquiat was born in Brooklyn in 1960 and lives in Manhattan. His paintings have been exhibited by the Whitney Museum of American Art, The Fun Gallery, New York and The Larry Gagosian Gallery, Los Angeles.
Louisa Chase was born in Panama City, Panama in 1951 and lives in New York. Her works have been included in exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art, the New Museum, New York and a recent one-woman exhibition at the Robert Miller Gallery, New York.
Patrick Proctor was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1936 and currently lives in London. His paintings and drawings were exhibited recently at the Red Fern Gallery, London.
William Wegman was born in Holyoke, Massachusetts in 1942 and lives in New York. His photographs, drawings, and video tapes have been exhibited internationally, including recent exhibitions at the Holly Solomon Gallery, New York, and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. The ten photographs appearing in this issue have been published in a limited edition portfolio by Holly Solomon Editions.

FEATURE

Timothy Tung, Associate Professor and specialist in Chinese materials in the library department at the City College, writes regularly for *Dushu*, a Peking literary journal. His works have appeared in the Op-Ed Page and Book Review of the *New York Times*, *Saturday Review*, *US-China Review*, the *People's Daily* and other Chinese and American publications.

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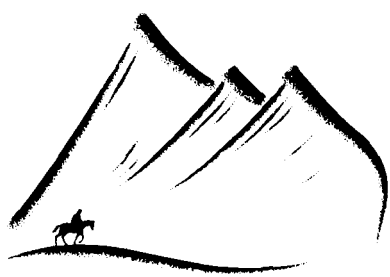
The Paris Review is pleased to announce that for his poem "One of the Muses," C.K. Williams is the third winner of the Bernard F. Conners Poetry Prize—one thousand dollars donated annually by the former publisher of *The Paris Review* (1976-1978) for a long poem.

ERRATUM

In issue #86 of *The Paris Review*, the table of contents listed the wrong roman numeral designation for their Art of Fiction interviews. For cataloguing purposes, the interviews should be listed as Erskine Caldwell: The Art of Fiction LXXII and P.L. Travers: The Art of Fiction LXXIII.



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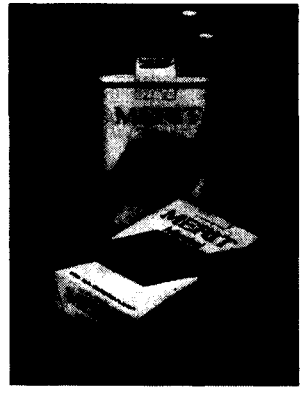

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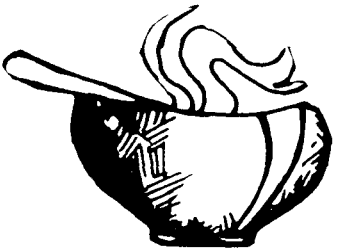

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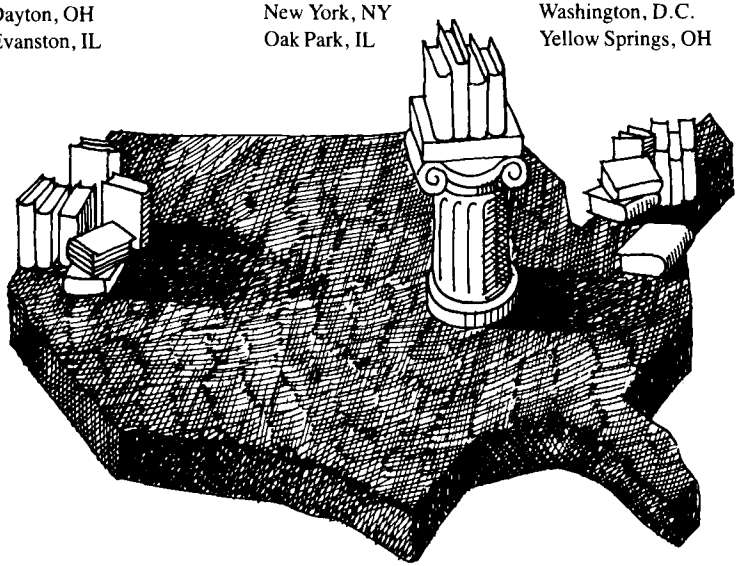

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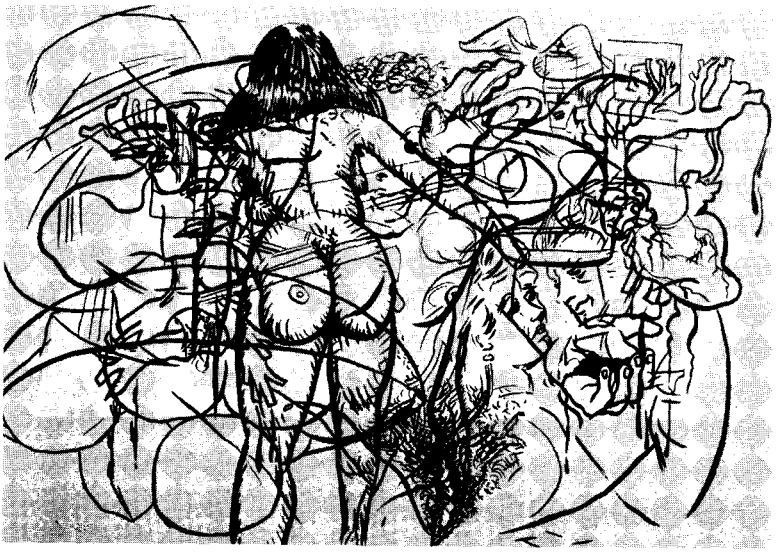

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